

A Round  
OF  
T A L E S

*From* Washington Irving  
*to* Algernon Blackwood

Selected by

N. HENRY & H. A. TREBLE



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## WASHINGTON IRVING

1783-1859

### THE BELATED TRAVELLERS

It was late one evening that a carriage, drawn by mules, slowly toiled its way up one of the passes of the Apennines. It was through one of the wildest defiles, where a hamlet occurred only at distant intervals, perched on the summit of some rocky height, or the white towers of a convent peeped out from among the thick mountain foliage. The carriage was of ancient and ponderous construction. Its faded embellishments spoke of former splendour, but its crazy springs and axle-trees creaked out the tale of present decline. Within was seated a tall, thin old gentleman, in a kind of military travelling dress, and a foraging cap trimmed with fur, though the grey locks which stole from under it hinted that his fighting days were over. Beside him was a pale, beautiful girl of eighteen, dressed in something of a northern or Polish costume. One servant was seated in front, a rusty, crusty-looking fellow, with a scar across his face, an orange-tawny *schmurbart*, or pair of moustaches, bristling from under his nose, and altogether the air of an old soldier.

It was, in fact, the equipage of a Polish nobleman; a wreck of one of those princely families once of almost oriental magnificence, but broken down and impoverished by the disasters of Poland. The Count, like many other generous spirits, had been found guilty of the crime of patriotism, and was, in a manner, an exile from his country. He had resided for some time in the first cities of Italy, for the education of his daughter, in whom all his cares and pleasures were now centred. He had taken her into society, where her beauty and her accomplishments gained

her many admirers; and, had she not been the daughter of a poor broken-down Polish nobleman, it is more than probable many would have contended for her hand. Suddenly, however, her health became delicate and drooping; her gaiety fled with the roses of her cheek, and she sank into silence and debility. The old Count saw the change with the solicitude of a parent. 'We must try a change of air and scene,' said he; and in a few days the old family carriage was rumbling among the Apennines.

Their only attendant was the veteran Caspar, who had been born in the family, and grown rusty in its service. He had followed his master in all his fortunes; had fought by his side; had stood over him when fallen in battle; and had received, in his defence, the sabre-cut which added such grimness to his countenance. He was now his valet, his steward, his butler, his factotum. The only being that rivalled his master in his affections was his youthful mistress. She had grown up under his eye, he had led her by the hand when she was a child, and he now looked upon her with the fondness of a parent. Nay, he even took the freedom of a parent in giving his blunt opinion on all matters which he thought were for her good; and felt a parent's vanity at seeing her gazed at and admired.

The evening was thickening; they had been for some time passing through narrow gorges of the mountains, along the edges of a tumbling stream. The scenery was lonely and savage. The rocks often beetled over the road, with flocks of white goats browsing on their briuks, and gazing down upon the travellers. They had between two and three leagues yet to go before they could reach any village; yet the muleteer, Pietro, a tippling old fellow who had refreshed himself at the last halting-place with a more than ordinary quantity of wine, sat singing and talking alternately to his mules, and suffering them to lag on at a snail's pace, in spite of the frequent entreaties of the Count and maledictions of Caspar.

The clouds began to roll in heavy masses among the mountains, shrouding their summits from view. The air was damp and chilly. The Count's solicitude on his daughter's account overcame his usual patience. He leaned from the carriage, and called to old Pietro in an angry tone:

‘Forward!’ said he. ‘It will be midnight before we arrive at our inn.’

‘Yonder it is, signor,’ said the muleteer.

‘Where?’ demanded the Count.

‘Yonder,’ said Pietro, pointing to a desolate pile about a quarter of a league distant.

‘That the place?—why, it looks more like a ruin than an inn. I thought we were to put up for the night at a comfortable village.’

Here Pietro uttered a string of piteous exclamations and ejaculations, such as are ever at the tip of the tongue of a delinquent muleteer. ‘Such roads! and such mountains! and then his poor animals were wayworn, and leg-weary; they would fall lame; they would never be able to reach the village. And then what could his Excellenza wish for better than the inn; a perfect castello—a palazza—and such people!—and such a larder!—and such beds!—His Excellenza might fare as sumptuously, and sleep as soundly there as a prince!’

The Count was easily persuaded, for he was anxious to get his daughter out of the night air; so in a little while the old carriage rattled and jingled into the great gateway of the inn.

The building did certainly in some measure answer to the muleteer’s description. It was large enough for either castle or palace; built in a strong, but simple and almost rude style; with a great quantity of waste room. It had in fact been, in former times, a hunting-seat of one of the Italian princes. There was space enough within its walls and outbuildings to have accommodated a little army. A scanty household seemed now to people this dreary mansion. The faces that presented themselves on the arrival of the travellers were begrimed with dirt, and scowling in their expression. They all knew old Pietro, however, and gave him a welcome as he entered, singing and talking, and almost whooping, into the gateway.

The hostess of the inn waited herself on the Count and his daughter, to show them the apartments. They were conducted through a long gloomy corridor, and then through a suite of chambers opening into each other, with lofty ceilings, and great beams extending across them. Everything, however, had a wretched, squalid look. The walls

were damp and bare, excepting that here and there hung some great painting, large enough for a chapel, and blackened out of all distinction.

They chose two bedrooms, one within another; the inner one for the daughter. The bedsteads were massive and misshapen; but, on examining the beds so vaunted by old Pietro, they found them stuffed with fibres of hemp knotted in great lumps. The Count shrugged his shoulders, but there was no choice left.

The chilliness of the apartments crept to their bones; and they were glad to return to a common chamber, or kind of hall, where was a fire burning in a huge cavern, miscalled a chimney. A quantity of green wood, just thrown on, puffed out volumes of smoke. The room corresponded to the rest of the mansion. The floor was paved and dirty. A great oaken table stood in the centre, immovable from its size and weight.

The only thing that contradicted this prevalent air of indigence was the dress of the hostess. She was a slattern of course; yet her garments, though dirty and negligent, were of costly materials. She wore several rings of great value on her fingers, and jewels in her ears, and round her neck was a string of large pearls, to which was attached a sparkling crucifix. She had the remains of beauty, yet there was something in the expression of her countenance that inspired the young lady with singular aversion. She was officious and obsequious in her attentions, and both the Count and his daughter felt relieved when she consigned them to the care of a dark, sullen-looking servant-maid, and went off to superintend the supper.

Caspar was indignant at the muleteer for having, either through negligence or design, subjected his master and mistress to such quarters; and vowed by his moustaches to have revenge on the old varlet the moment they were safe out from among the mountains. He kept up a continual quarrel with the sulky servant-maid, which only served to increase the sinister expression with which she regarded the travellers, from under her strong dark eyebrows.

As to the Count, he was a good-humoured, passive traveller. Perhaps real misfortunes had subdued his spirit, and rendered him tolerant of many of those petty evils

which make prosperous men miserable. He drew a large broken arm-chair to the fireside for his daughter, and another for himself, and, seizing an enormous pair of tongs, endeavoured to rearrange the wood so as to produce a blaze. His efforts, however, were only repaid by thicker puffs of smoke, which almost overcame the good gentleman's patience. He would draw back, cast a look upon his delicate daughter, then upon the cheerless, squalid apartment, and, shrugging his shoulders, would give a fresh stir to the fire.

Of all the miseries of a comfortless inn, however, there is none greater than sulky attendance: the good Count for some time bore the smoke in silence, rather than address himself to the scowling servant-maid. At length he was compelled to beg for drier firewood. The woman retired muttering. On re-entering the room hastily, with an armful of faggots, her foot slipped; she fell, and, striking her head against the corner of a chair, cut her temple severely.

The blow stunned her for a time, and the wound bled profusely. When she recovered, she found the Count's daughter administering to her wound, and binding it up with her own handkerchief. It was such an attention as any woman of ordinary feeling would have yielded; but perhaps there was something in the appearance of the lovely being who bent over her, or in the tones of her voice, that touched the heart of the woman, unused to be ministered to by such hands. Certain it is, she was strongly affected. She caught the delicate hand of the Polonaise, and pressed it fervently to her lips:

'May San Francesco watch over you, signora!' exclaimed she.

A new arrival broke the stillness of the inn. It was a Spanish Princess with a numerous retinue. The courtyard was in an uproar; the house in a bustle. The landlady hurried to attend such distinguished guests; and the poor Count and his daughter and their supper were for a moment forgotten. The veteran Caspar muttered Polish maledictions enough to agonize an Italian ear; but it was impossible to convince the hostess of the superiority of his old master and young mistress to the whole nobility of Spain.

The noise of the arrival had attracted the daughter to

the window just as the new-comers had alighted. A young cavalier sprang out of the carriage, and handed out the Princess. The latter was a little shrivelled old lady with a face of parchment and sparkling black eye; she was richly and gaily dressed, and walked with the assistance of a golden-headed cane as high as herself. The young man was tall and elegantly formed. The Count's daughter shrunk back at sight of him, though the deep frame of the window screened her from observation. She gave a heavy sigh as she closed the casement. What that sigh meant I cannot say. Perhaps it was at the contrast between the splendid equipage of the Princess, and the crazy rheumatic-looking old vehicle of her father, which stood hard by. Whatever might be the reason, the young lady closed the casement with a sigh. She returned to her chair—a slight shivering passed over her delicate frame; she leaned her elbow on the arm of the chair, rested her pale cheek in the palm of her hand, and looked mournfully into the fire.

The Count thought she appeared paler than usual.

'Does anything ail thee, my child?' said he.

'Nothing, dear father!' replied she, laying her hand within his, and looking up smiling in his face; but as she said so, a treacherous tear rose suddenly to her eye, and she turned away her head.

'The air of the window has chilled thee,' said the Count, fondly, 'but a good night's rest will make all well again.'

The supper-table was at length laid, and the supper about to be served, when the hostess appeared, with her usual obsequiousness, apologizing for showing in the new-comers; but the night-air was cold, and there was no other chamber in the inn with a fire in it. She had scarcely made the apology when the Princess entered, leaning on the arm of the elegant young man.

The Count immediately recognized her for a lady whom he had met frequently in society, both at Rome and Naples; and at whose conversaziones, in fact, he had constantly been invited. The cavalier, too, was her nephew and heir, who had been greatly admired in the gay circles both for his merits and prospects, and who had once been on a visit at the same time with his daughter and himself at the villa of a nobleman near Naples. Report had recently affianced him to a rich Spanish heiress.

The meeting was agreeable to both the Count and the Princess. The former was a gentleman of the old school, courteous in the extreme; the Princess had been a belle in her youth, and a woman of fashion all her life, and liked to be attended to.

The young man approached the daughter, and began something of a complimentary observation; but his manner was embarrassed, and his compliment ended in an indistinct murmur; while the daughter bowed without looking up, moved her lips without articulating a word, and sank again into her chair, where she sat gazing into the fire, with a thousand varying expressions passing over her countenance.

This singular greeting of the young people was not perceived by the old ones, who were occupied at the time with their own courteous salutations. It was arranged that they should sup together; and as the Princess travelled with her own cook, a very tolerable supper soon smoked upon the board. This, too, was assisted by choice wines, and liquors, and delicate confitures brought from one of her carriages; for she was a veteran epicure, and curious in her relish for the good things of this world. She was, in fact, a vivacious little old lady, who mingled the woman of dissipation with the devotee. She was actually on her way to Loretto to expiate a long life of gallantries and peccadilloes by a rich offering at the holy shrine. She was, to be sure, rather a luxurious penitent, and a contrast to the primitive pilgrims, with scrip and staff, and cockleshell; but then it would be unreasonable to expect such self-denial from people of fashion; and there was not a doubt of the ample efficacy of the rich crucifixes, and golden vessels, and jewelled ornaments, which she was bearing to the treasury of the blessed Virgin.

The Princess and the Count chatted much during supper about the scenes and society in which they had mingled, and did not notice that they had all the conversation to themselves: the young people were silent and constrained. The daughter ate nothing, in spite of the politeness of the Princess, who continually pressed her to taste of one or other of the delicacies. The Count shook his head.

'She is not well this evening,' said he. 'I thought she would have fainted just now as she was looking out of the window at your carriage on its arrival.'



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'She is not well this evening,' said he. 'I thought she would have fainted just now as she was looking out of the window at your carriage on its arrival.'

A crimson glow flushed to the very temples of the daughter; but she leaned over her plate, and her tresses cast a shade over her countenance.

When supper was over, they drew their chairs about the great fireplace. The flame and smoke had subsided, and a heap of glowing embers diffused a grateful warmth. A guitar, which had been brought from the Count's carriage, leaned against the wall; the Princess perceived it: 'Can we not have a little music before parting for the night?' demanded she.

The Count was proud of his daughter's accomplishment, and joined in the request. The young man made an effort of politeness, and, taking up the guitar, presented it, though in an embarrassed manner, to the fair musician. She would have declined it, but was too much confused to do so; indeed, she was so nervous and agitated, that she dared not trust her voice to make an excuse. She touched the instrument with a faltering hand, and, after preluding a little, accompanied herself in several Polish airs. Her father's eyes glistened as he sat gazing on her. Even the crusty Caspar lingered in the room, partly through a fondness for the music of his native country, but chiefly through his pride in the musician. Indeed, the melody of the voice, and the delicacy of the touch, were enough to have charmed more fastidious ears. The little Princess nodded her head and tapped her hand to the music, though exceedingly out of time; while the nephew sat buried in profound contemplation of a black picture on the opposite wall.

'And now,' said the Count, patting her cheek fondly, 'one more favour. Let the Princess hear that little Spanish air you were so fond of. You can't think,' added he, 'what a proficiency she has made in your language; though she has been a sad girl and neglected it of late.'

The colour flushed the pale cheek of the daughter. She hesitated, murmured something; but, with sudden effort, collected herself, struck the guitar boldly, and began. It was a Spanish romance, with something of love and melancholy in it. She gave the first stanza with great expression, for the tremulous, melting tones of her voice went to the heart; but her articulation failed, her lip quivered, the song died away, and she burst into tears.

The Count folded her tenderly in his arms. 'Thou art

not well, my child,' said he, 'and I am tasking thee cruelly. Retire to thy chamber, and God bless thee!' She bowed to the company without raising her eyes, and glided out of the room.

The Count shook his head as the door closed. 'Something is the matter with that child,' said he, 'which I cannot divine. She has lost all health and spirits lately. She was always a tender flower, and I had much pains to rear her. Excuse a father's foolishness,' continued he, 'but I have seen much trouble in my family; and this poor girl is all that is now left to me; and she used to be so lively——'

'Maybe she's in love!' said the little Princess, with a shrewd nod of the head.

'Impossible!' replied the good Count artlessly. 'She has never mentioned a word of such a thing to me.'

How little did the worthy gentleman dream of the thousand cares, and griefs, and mighty love concerns which agitate a virgin heart, and which a timid girl scarcely breathes unto herself!

The nephew of the Princess rose abruptly and walked about the room.

When she found herself alone in her chamber, the feelings of the young lady, so long restrained, broke forth with violence. She opened the casement that the cool air might blow upon her throbbing temples. Perhaps there was some little pride or pique mingled with her emotions; though her gentle nature did not seem calculated to harbour any such angry inmate.

'He saw me weep!' said she, with a sudden mantling of the cheek, and a swelling of the throat,—'but no matter!—no matter!'

And, so saying, she threw her white arms across the window-frame, buried her face in them, and abandoned herself to an agony of tears. She remained lost in a reverie, until the sound of her father's and Caspar's voices in the adjoining room gave token that the party had retired for the night. The lights gleaming from window to window, showed that they were conducting the Princess to her apartments, which were in the opposite wing of the inn; and she distinctly saw the figure of the nephew as he passed one of the casements.

She heaved a deep heart-drawn sigh, and was about to close the lattice, when her attention was caught by words spoken below her window by two persons who had just turned an angle of the building.

'But what will become of the poor young lady?' said a voice which she recognized for that of the servant-woman.

'Pooh! she must take her chance,' was the reply from old Pietro.

'But cannot she be spared?' asked the other entreatingly; 'she's so kind-hearted!'

'*Cospetto!* what has got into thee?' replied the other petulantly: 'would you mar the whole business for the sake of a silly girl?' By this time they had got so far from the window that the Polonaise could hear nothing further.

There was something in this fragment of conversation calculated to alarm. Did it relate to herself?—and if so, what was this impending danger from which it was entreated that she might be spared? She was several times on the point of tapping at her father's door, to tell him what she had heard, but she might have been mistaken; she might have heard indistinctly; the conversation might have alluded to some one else; at any rate, it was too indefinite to lead to any conclusion. While in this state of irresolution, she was startled by a low knocking against the wainscot in a remote part of her gloomy chamber. On holding up the light, she beheld a small door there, which she had not before remarked. It was bolted on the inside. She advanced, and demanded who knocked, and was answered in the voice of the female domestic. On opening the door, the woman stood before it pale and agitated. She entered softly, laying her finger on her lips in sign of caution and secrecy.

'Fly!' said she; 'leave this house instantly, or you are lost!'

The young lady, trembling with alarm, demanded an explanation.

'I have no time,' replied the woman, 'I dare not—I shall be missed if I linger here—but fly instantly, or you are lost!'

'And leave my father?'

'Where is he?'

‘In the adjoining chamber.’

‘Call him, then, but lose no time.’

The young lady knocked at her father’s door. He was not yet retired to bed. She hurried into his room, and told him of the fearful warnings she had received. The Count returned with her into her chamber, followed by Caspar. His questions soon drew the truth out of the embarrassed answers of the woman. The inn was beset by robbers. They were to be introduced after midnight, when the attendants of the Princess and the rest of the travellers were sleeping, and would be an easy prey.

‘But we can barricade the inn, we can defend ourselves,’ said the Count.

‘What! when the people of the inn are in league with the banditti?’

‘How, then, are we to escape? Can we not order out the carriage and depart?’

‘San Francesco! for what? To give the alarm that the plot is discovered? That would make the robbers desperate, and bring them on you at once. They have had notice of the rich booty in the inn, and will not easily let it escape them.’

‘But how else are we to get off?’

‘There is a horse behind the inn,’ said the woman, ‘from which the man has just dismounted who has been to summon the aid of part of the band at a distance.’

‘One horse; and there are three of us!’ said the Count.

‘And the Spanish Princess!’ cried the daughter anxiously—‘How can she be extricated from the danger?’

‘*Diavolo!* what is she to me?’ said the woman in sudden passion. ‘It is *you* I come to save, and you will betray me, and we shall all be lost! Hark!’ continued she, ‘I am called—I shall be discovered—one word more. This door leads by a staircase to the courtyard. Under the shed, in the rear of the yard, is a small door leading out to the fields. You will find a horse there; mount it; make a circuit under the shadow of a ridge of rocks that you will see; proceed cautiously and quietly until you cross a brook, and find yourself on the road just where there are three white crosses nailed against a tree; then put your horse to his speed, and make the best of your way

to the village—but recollect, my life is in your hands—say nothing of what you have heard or seen, whatever may happen at this inn.’

The woman hurried away. A short and agitated consultation took place between the Count, his daughter, and the veteran Caspar. The young lady seemed to have lost all apprehension for herself in her solicitude for the safety of the Princess. ‘To fly in selfish silence, and leave her to be massacred!’—A shuddering seized her at the very thought. The gallantry of the Count, too, revolted at the idea. He could not consent to turn his back upon a party of helpless travellers, and leave them in ignorance of the danger which hung over them.

‘But what is to become of the young lady,’ said Caspar, ‘if the alarm is given, and the inn thrown in a tumult? What may happen to her in a chance-medley affray?’

Here the feelings of the father were roused; he looked upon his lovely, helpless child, and trembled at the chance of her falling into the hands of ruffians.

The daughter, however, thought nothing of herself. ‘The Princess! the Princess!—only let the Princess know her danger.’ She was willing to share it with her.

At length Caspar interfered with the zeal of a faithful old servant. No time was to be lost—the first thing was to get the young lady out of danger. ‘Mount the horse,’ said he to the Count, ‘take her behind you, and fly! Make for the village, rouse the inhabitants, and send assistance. Leave me here to give the alarm to the Princess and her people. I am an old soldier, and I think we shall be able to stand siege until you send us aid.’

The daughter would again have insisted on staying with the Princess.

‘For what?’ said old Caspar bluntly. ‘You could do no good—you would be in the way;—we should have to take care of you instead of ourselves.’

There was no answering these objections; the Count seized his pistols, and, taking his daughter under his arm, moved towards the staircase. The young lady paused, stepped back, and said, faltering with agitation—‘There is a young cavalier with the Princess—her nephew—perhaps he may—’

‘I understand you, Mademoiselle,’ replied old Caspar

with a significant nod; 'not a hair of his head shall suffer harm if I can help it!'

The young lady blushed deeper than ever; she had not anticipated being so thoroughly understood by the blunt old servant.

'That is not what I mean,' said she, hesitating. She would have added something, or made some explanation, but the moments were precious, and her father hurried her away.

They found their way through the courtyard to the small postern gate where the horse stood, fastened to a ring in the wall. The Count mounted, took his daughter behind him, and they proceeded as quietly as possible in the direction which the woman had pointed out. Many a fearful and anxious look did the daughter cast back upon the gloomy pile; the lights which had feebly twinkled through the dusky casements were one by one disappearing, a sign that the inmates were gradually sinking to repose; and she trembled with impatience, lest succour should not arrive until that repose had been fatally interrupted.

They passed silently and safely along the skirts of the rocks, protected from observation by their overhanging shadows. They crossed the brook, and reached the place where three white crosses nailed against a tree told of some murder that had been committed there. Just as they had reached this ill-omened spot they beheld several men in the gloom coming down a craggy defile among the rocks.

'Who goes there?' exclaimed a voice. The Count put spurs to his horse, but one of the men sprang forward and seized the bridle. The horse started back, and reared, and, had not the young lady clung to her father, she would have been thrown off. The Count leaned forward, put a pistol to the very head of the ruffian, and fired. The latter fell dead. The horse sprang forward. Two or three shots were fired which whistled by the fugitives, but only served to augment their speed. They reached the village in safety.

The whole place was soon roused; but such was the awe in which the banditti were held, that the inhabitants shrunk at the idea of encountering them. A desperate band had for some time infested that pass through the mountains, and the inn had long been suspected of being one of those horrible places where the unsuspecting wayfarer is entrapped



and silently disposed of. The rich ornaments worn by the slattern hostess of the inn had excited heavy suspicions. Several instances had occurred of small parties of travellers disappearing mysteriously on that road, who, it was supposed at first, had been carried off by the robbers for the purpose of ransom, but who had never been heard of more. Such were the tales buzzed in the ears of the Count by the villagers, as he endeavoured to rouse them to the rescue of the Princess and her train from their perilous situation. The daughter seconded the exertions of her father with all the eloquence of prayers, and tears, and beauty. Every moment that elapsed increased her anxiety until it became agonizing. Fortunately there was a body of gendarmes resting at the village. A number of the young villagers volunteered to accompany them, and the little army was put in motion. The Count, having deposited his daughter in a place of safety, was too much of the old soldier not to hasten to the scene of danger. It would be difficult to paint the anxious agitation of the young lady while awaiting the result.

The party arrived at the inn just in time. The robbers, finding their plans discovered, and the travellers prepared for their reception, had become open and furious in their attack. The Princess's party had barricaded themselves in one suite of apartments, and repulsed the robbers from the doors and windows. Caspar had shown the generalship of a veteran, and the nephew of the Princess the dashing valour of a young soldier. Their ammunition, however, was nearly exhausted, and they would have found it difficult to hold out much longer, when a discharge from the musketry of the gendarmes gave them the joyful tidings of success.

A fierce fight ensued, for part of the robbers were surprised in the inn, and had to stand siege in their turn; while their comrades made desperate attempts to relieve them from under cover of the neighbouring rocks and thickets.

I cannot pretend to give a minute account of the fight, as I have heard it related in a variety of ways. Suffice to say, the robbers were defeated; several of them killed, and several taken prisoners; which last, together with the people of the inn, were either executed or sent to the galleys.

I picked up these particulars in the course of a journey which I made some time after the event had taken place. I passed by the very inn. It was then dismantled, excepting one wing, in which a body of gendarmes was stationed. They pointed out to me the shot-holes in the window-frames, the walls, and the panels of the doors. There were a number of withered limbs dangling from the branches of a neighbouring tree, and blackening in the air, which I was told were the limbs of the robbers who had been slain, and the culprits who had been executed. The whole place had a dismal, wild, forlorn look.

‘Were any of the Princess’s party killed?’ inquired the Englishman.

‘As far as I can recollect, there were two or three.

‘Not the nephew, I trust?’ said the fair Venetian.

‘Oh no: he hastened with the Count to relieve the anxiety of the daughter by the assurances of victory. The young lady had been sustained throughout the interval of suspense by the very intensity of her feelings. The moment she saw her father returning in safety, accompanied by the nephew of the Princess, she uttered a cry of rapture, and fainted. Happily, however, she soon recovered, and, what is more, was married shortly afterwards to the young cavalier, and the whole party accompanied the old Princess in her pilgrimage to Loretto, where her votive offerings may still be seen in the treasury of the Santa Casa.’

*From Tales of a Traveller.*

# FREDERICK MARRYATT

1792-1848

## STORY OF THE CAMEL-DRIVER

THAT your highness should wish for an explanation of the very doubtful language which you overheard last night, I am not surprised; but I trust you will acknowledge, when I have finished my narrative, that I was fully justified in the expressions which I made use of. I am by birth (as my dress denotes) a fellah of this country, but I was not always so poor as I am now. My father was the possessor of many camels, which he let out for hire to the merchants of the different caravans which annually leave this city. When he died, I came into possession of his property, and the goodwill of those he most faithfully served. The consequence was that I had full employ; my camels were always engaged; and as I invariably accompanied them that they might not be ill-treated, I have several times been to Mecca, as this ragged green turban will testify. My life was one of alternate difficulty and enjoyment. I returned to my wife and children with delight after my journeys of suffering and privation, and fully appreciated the value of my home from the short time that my occupation would permit me to remain there. I worked hard and became rich.

It was during a painful march through the desert with one of the caravans that a favourite she-camel foaled. At first it was my intention to leave the young one to its fate, as my camels had already suffered much; but on examination the creature showed such strength and symmetry that I resolved to bring it up. I therefore divided half of one of the loads among the other camels, and tied the foal upon the one which I partly relieved for the purpose. We arrived safely at Cairo; and as the little animal grew up

I had more than ever reason to be satisfied that I had saved its life. All good judges considered it a prodigy of beauty and strength, and prophesied that it would some day be selected as the holy camel to carry the Koran in the pilgrimage to Mecca. And so did it happen about five years afterwards, during which interval I accompanied the caravans as before ; and each year added to my wealth.

My camel had by this time arrived to his full perfection : he stood nearly three feet higher than any other ; and, when the caravan was preparing, I led him to the sheiks, and offered him as a candidate for the honour. They would have accepted him immediately, had it not been for a maribout, who, for some reason or another, desired them not to employ him, asserting that the caravan would be unlucky if my camel was the bearer of the holy Koran.

As this man was considered to be a prophet, the sheiks were afraid, and would not give a decided answer. Irritated at the maribout's interference, I reviled him ; he raised a hue and cry against me, and being joined by the populace, I was nearly killed. As I hastened away, the wretch threw some sand after me, crying out, 'Thus shall the caravan perish from the judgement of Heaven, if that cursed camel is permitted to carry the holy word of the Prophet.' The consequence was that an inferior camel was selected, and I was disappointed. But on the ensuing year the maribout was not at Cairo ; and as there was no animal equal to mine in beauty, it was chosen by the sheiks without a dissentient voice.

I hastened home to my wife, overjoyed at my good fortune, which I hoped would bring a blessing upon my house. She was equally delighted, and my beautiful camel seemed also to be aware of the honour to which he was destined, as he repaid our caresses, curving and twisting his long neck, and laying his head upon our shoulders.

The caravan assembled ; it was one of the largest which for many years had quitted Cairo, amounting in all to eighteen thousand camels. You may imagine my pride when, as the procession passed through the streets, I pointed out to my wife the splendid animal, with his bridle studded with jewels and gold, led by the holy sheiks in their green robes, carrying on his back the chest which contained the law of our Prophet, looking proudly on each side of him as

he walked along accompanied by bands of music and the loud chorus of the singing men and women.

As on the ensuing day the caravan was to form outside of the town, I returned home to my family that I might have the last of their company, having left my other camels, who were hired by the pilgrims, in charge of an assistant who accompanied me in my journeys. The next morning I bade adieu to my wife and children, and was quitting the house, when my youngest child, who was about two years old, called to me and begged me to return one moment and give her a farewell caress. As I lifted her in my arms, she, as usual, put her hand into the pocket of my loose jacket to search, as I thought, for the fruit that I usually brought home for her when I returned from the bazaar, but there was none there; and having replaced her in the arms of her mother, I hastened away that I might not be too late at my post. Your highness is aware that we do not march one following another as most caravans do, but in one straight line abreast. The necessary arrangement occupies the whole day previous to the commencement of our journey, which takes place immediately after the sun goes down. We set off that evening, and after a march of two nights arrived at Adjeroid, where we remained three days to procure our supplies of water from Suez, and to refresh the animals previous to our forced march over the desert of El Tyh.

The last day of our repose, as I was smoking my pipe with my camels kneeling down around me, I perceived a herie coming from the direction of Cairo, at a very swift pace. It passed me by like a flash of lightning, but still I had sufficient time to recognize in its rider the maribout who had prophesied evil if my camel was employed to carry the Koran on the pilgrimage of the year before.

The maribout stopped his dromedary at the tent of the emir Hadjy, who commanded the caravan. Anxious to know the reason of his following us, which I had a foreboding was connected with my camel, I hastened to the spot. I found him haranguing the emir and the people who surrounded him, denouncing woe and death to the whole caravan if my camel was not immediately destroyed and another selected in his stead. Having for some time declaimed in such an energetic manner as to spread con-

sternation throughout the camp, he turned his dromedary again to the west, and in a few minutes was out of sight.

The emir was confused; murmurings and consultations were arising among the crowd. I was afraid that they would listen to the suggestions of the maribout; and, alarmed for my camel and the loss of the honour conferred upon him, I was guilty of a lie.

'O emir!' said I, 'listen not to that man, who is mine enemy! he came to my house, he ate of my bread, and would have been guilty of the basest ingratitude by insulting the mother of my children; I drove him from my door, and thus would he revenge himself. So may it fare with me, and with the caravan, as I speak the truth.'

I was believed; the injunctions of the maribout were disregarded, and that night we proceeded on our march through the plains of El Tyh.

As your highness has never yet made a pilgrimage, you can have no conception of the country which we had to pass through; it was one vast region of sand, where the tracks of those who pass over it are obliterated by the wind—a vast sea without water—an expanse of desolation. We plunged into the desert; and as the enormous collection of animals, extending as far as the eye could reach, held their noiseless way, it seemed as if it were the passing by of shadows.

We met with no accident, notwithstanding the prophecies of the maribout; and after a fatiguing march of seven nights, arrived safely at Nakhel, where we replenished our exhausted water-skins. Those whom I knew joked with me when we met at the wells, at the false prophecies of my enemy. We had now three days of severe fatigue to encounter before we arrived at the castle of Akaba, and we recommenced our painful journey.

It was on the morning of the second day, about an hour after we had pitched our tents, that the fatal prophecy of the maribout, and the judgement of Allah upon me for the lie which I had called on him to witness, was fulfilled.

A dark cloud appeared upon the horizon; it gradually increased, changing to a bright yellow, and then rose and rose until it had covered one-half of the firmament, when it suddenly burst upon us in a hurricane which carried everything before it, cutting off mountains of sand at the

base, and hurling them upon our devoted heads. The splendid tent of the emir, which first submitted to the blast, passed close to me, flying along with the velocity of the herie, while every other was either levelled to the ground or carried up into the air, and whirled about in mad gyration.

Moving pillars of sand passed over us, overthrowing and suffocating man and beast; the camels thrust their muzzles into the ground, and, profiting by their instinct, we did the same, awaiting our fate in silence and trepidation. But the simoom had not yet poured upon us all its horrors; in a few minutes nothing was to be distinguished—all was darkness, horrible darkness, rendered more horrible by the ravings of dying men, the screams of women, and the mad career of horses and other animals, which, breaking their cords, trod down thousands in their endeavours to escape from the overwhelming fury of the desert storm.

I had laid myself down by one of my camels, and thrusting my head under his side, awaited my death with all the horror of one who thought that the wrath of Heaven was justly poured upon him. For an hour I remained in that position, and surely there can be no pains in hell greater than those which I suffered during that space of time. The burning sand forced itself into my garments, the pores of my skin were closed, I hardly ventured to breathe the hot blast which was offered as the only means of protracted existence. At last I fetched my respiration with greater freedom, and no more heard the howling of the blast. Gradually I lifted my head, but my eyes had lost their power. I could distinguish nothing but a yellow glare. I imagined that I was blind, and what chance could there be for a man who was blind in the desert of El Tyh? Again I laid my head down, thought of my wife and children, and, abandoning myself to despair, I wept bitterly.

The tears that I shed had a resuscitating effect upon my frame. I felt revived, and again lifted up my head—I could see! I prostrated myself in humble thanksgiving to Allah, and then rose upon my feet. Yes, I could see; but what a sight was presented to my eyes! I could have closed them for ever with thankfulness. The sky was serene, and the boundless prospect uninterrupted as before; but the thousands who accompanied me, the splendid gathering of

men and beasts, where were they? Where was the emir Hadji and his guards? where the mamelukes, the agas, the janissaries, and the holy sheiks? the sacred camel, the singers, and musicians? the varieties of nations and tribes who had joined the caravan? All perished! Mountains of sand marked the spots where they had been entombed, with no other monuments save here and there part of the body of a man or beast not yet covered by the desert wave. All, all were gone, save one; and that one, that guilty one, was myself, who had been permitted to exist, that he might behold the awful mischief which had been created by his presumption and his crime.

For some minutes I contemplated the scene, careless and despairing; for I imagined that I had only been permitted to outlive the whole that my death might be even more terrible. But my wife and children rushed to my memory, and I resolved for their sakes to save, if possible, a life which had no other ties to bind it to this earth. I tore off a piece of my turban, and, cleaning the sand out of my bleeding nostrils, walked over the field of death.

Between the different hillocks I found several camels which had not been covered. Perceiving a water-skin, I rushed to it, that I might quench my raging thirst; but the contents had been dried up—not a drop remained. I found another, but I had no better success. I then determined to open one of the bodies of the camels, and obtain the water which it might still have remaining in its stomach. This I effected, and having quenched my thirst—to which even the heated element which I poured down seemed delicious—I hastened to open the remainder of the animals before putrefaction should take place, and collect the scanty supplies in the water-skins. I procured more than half a skin of water, and then returned to my own camel, which I had lain down beside during the simoom. I sat on the body of the animal, and reflected upon the best method of proceeding. I knew that I was but one day's journey from the springs; but how little chance had I of reaching them! I also knew the direction which I must take. The day had nearly closed, and I resolved to make the attempt.

As the sun disappeared I rose, and with the skin of water on my back proceeded on my hopeless journey. I walked the whole of that night and by break of day I imagined that



I must have made half the progress of a caravan ; I had, therefore, still a day to pass in the desert without any protection from the consuming heat, and then another night of toil. Although I had sufficient water, I had no food. When the sun rose I sat down upon a hillock of burning sand, to be exposed to its rays for twelve everlasting hours. Before the hour of noon arrived, my brain became heated—I nearly lost my reason. My vision was imperfect, or rather I saw what did not exist. At one time lakes of water presented themselves to my eager eyes ; and so certain was I of their existence, that I rose and staggered till I was exhausted in pursuit of them. At another I beheld trees at a distance, and could see the acacias waving in the breeze ; I hastened to throw myself under their shade, and arrived at some small shrub, which had thus been magnified.

So was I tormented and deceived during the whole of that dreadful day, which still haunts me in my dreams. At last the night closed in, and the stars as they lighted up, warned me that I might continue my journey. I drank plentifully from my water-skin, and recommenced my solitary way. I followed the track marked out by the bones of camels and horses of former caravans which had perished in the desert, and when the day dawned I perceived the castle of Akaba at a short distance. Inspired with new life, I threw away the water-skin, redoubled my speed, and in half an hour had thrown myself down by the side of the fountain from which I had previously imbibed large draughts of the refreshing fluid. What happiness was then mine ! How heavenly to lie under the shade, breathing the cool air, listening to the warbling of the birds, and inhaling the perfume of the flowers, which luxuriated on that delightful spot ! After an hour I stripped, bathed myself, and taking another draught of water, fell into a sound sleep.

I awoke refreshed, but suffering under the cravings of hunger, which now assailed me. I had been three days without food ; but hitherto I had not felt the want of it, as my more importunate thirst had overcome the sensation. Now that the greater evil had been removed, the lesser increased, and became hourly more imperious. I walked out and scanned the horizon, with the hopes of some caravan appearing in sight ; but I watched in vain, and returned to the fountain. Two more days passed away, and no relief was at

hand ; my strength failed me ; I felt that I was dying ; and as the fountain murmured, and the birds sang, and the cold breeze fanned my cheeks, I thought that it would have been better to have been swallowed up in the desert than to be tantalized by expiring in such a paradise. I laid myself down to die, for I could sit up no more ; and as I turned round to take a last view of the running water, which had prolonged my existence, something hard pressed against my side. I thought it was a stone, and stretched out my hand to remove it, that I might be at ease in my last moments ; but when I felt there was no stone there ; it was something in the pocket of my jacket. I put my hand in, unconscious what it could be ; I pulled it out, and looking at it before I threw it away, found that it was a piece of *hard dry bread*. I thought that it had been sent to me from heaven, and it was as pure an offering as if it had come from thence, for it was the gift of innocence and affection—it was the piece of bread which my little darling girl had received for her breakfast, and which on my departure she had thrust into my pocket, when I imagined she had been searching for fruit. I crawled to the spring, moistened it, and devoured it with tears of gratitude to Heaven, mingled with the fond yearnings of a father's heart.

It saved my life ; for the next day a small caravan arrived which was bound to Cairo. The merchants treated me with great kindness, tied me on one of the camels, and I once more embraced my family, whom I had never thought to see again. Since that I have been poor, but contented—I deserved to lose all my property for my wickedness ; and I submit with resignation to the will of Allah.

And now I trust that your highness will acknowledge that I was justified in making use of the expression, that ‘Happy was the man who could *at all times* command a crust of bread !’

From *The Pusha of Many Tales*.

# NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

1804-1864

## FEATHERTOP: A MORALIZED LEGEND

‘DICKON,’ cried Mother Rigby, ‘a coal for my pipe.’

The pipe was in the old dame’s mouth when she said these words. She had thrust it there after filling it with tobacco, but without stooping to light it at the hearth, where indeed there was no appearance of a fire having been kindled that morning. Forthwith, however, as soon as the order was given, there was an intense red glow out of the bowl of the pipe, and a whiff of smoke from Mother Rigby’s lips. Whence the coal came, and how brought thither by an invisible hand, I have never been able to discover.

‘Good!’ quoth Mother Rigby, with a nod of her head. ‘Thank ye, Dickon! And now for making this scarecrow. Be within call, Dickon, in case I need you again.’

The good woman had risen thus early (for as yet it was scarcely sunrise) in order to set about making a scarecrow, which she intended to put in the middle of her corn-patch. It was now the latter week of May, and the crows and blackbirds had already discovered the little, green, rolled-up leaf of the Indian corn just peeping out of the soil. She was determined, therefore, to contrive as life-like a scarecrow as ever was seen, and to finish it immediately, from top to toe, so that it should begin its sentinel’s duty that very morning. Now Mother Rigby (as everybody must have heard) was one of the most cunning and potent witches in New England, and might, with very little trouble, have made a scarecrow ugly enough to frighten the minister himself. But on this occasion, as she had awakened in an uncommonly pleasant humour, and was further dulcified by her pipe of tobacco, she resolved to produce something fine, beautiful, and splendid, rather than hideous and horrible.

'I don't want to set up a hobgoblin in my own corn-patch, and almost at my own doorstep,' said Mother Rigby to herself, puffing out a whiff of smoke; 'I could do it if I pleased, but I'm tired of doing marvellous things, and so I'll keep within the bounds of everyday business, just for variety's sake. Besides, there is no use in scaring the little children for a mild roundabout, though 'tis true I'm a witch.'

It was settled, therefore, in her own mind, that the scarecrow should represent a fine gentleman of the period, so far as the materials at hand would allow. Perhaps it may be as well to enumerate the chief of the articles that went to the composition of this figure.

The most important item of all, probably, although it made so little show, was a certain broomstick, on which Mother Rigby had taken many an airy gallop at midnight, and which now served the scarecrow by way of a spinal column, or, as the unlearned phrase it, a backbone. One of its arms was a disabled flail, which used to be wielded by Goodman Rigby, before his spouse worried him out of this troublesome world; the other, if I mistake not, was composed of the pudding stick, and a broken rung of a chair, tied loosely together at the elbow. As for its legs, the right was a hoe handle, and the left an undistinguished and miscellaneous stick from the woodpile. Its lungs, stomach, and other affairs of that kind were nothing better than a meal bag stuffed with straw. Thus we have made out the skeleton and entire corporeity of the scarecrow, with the exception of its head; and this was admirably supplied by a somewhat withered and shrivelled pumpkin, in which Mother Rigby cut two holes for the eyes, and a slit for the mouth, leaving a bluish-coloured knob in the middle to pass for a nose. It was really quite a respectable face.

'I've seen worse ones on human shoulders, at any rate,' said Mother Rigby. 'And many a fine gentleman has a pumpkin-head, as well as my scarecrow.'

But the clothes, in this case, were to be the making of the man. So the good old woman took down from a peg an ancient plum-coloured coat of London-make, and with relics of embroidery on its seams, cuffs, pocket flaps, and button-holes, but lamentably worn and faded, patched at the elbows, tattered at the skirts, and threadbare all over. On

the left breast was a round hole, whence either a star of nobility had been rent away, or else the hot heart of some former wearer had scorched it through and through. The neighbours said that this rich garment belonged to the Black Man's wardrobe, and that he kept it at Mother Rigby's cottage for the convenience of slipping it on whenever he wished to make a grand appearance at the governor's table. To match the coat there was a velvet waistcoat of very ample size and formerly embroidered with foliage that had been as brightly golden as the maple leaves in October, but which had now quite vanished out of the substance of the velvet. Next came a pair of scarlet breeches, once worn by the French governor of Louisbourg, and the knees of which had touched the lower step of the throne of Louis le Grand. The Frenchman had given these small-clothes to an Indian powwow, who had parted with them to the old witch for a gill of strong waters, at one of their dances in the forest. Furthermore, Mother Rigby produced a pair of silk stockings and put them on the figure's legs, where they showed as unsubstantial as a dream, with the wooden reality of the two sticks making itself miserably apparent through the holes. Lastly, she put her dead husband's wig on the bare scalp of the pumpkin, and surmounted the whole with a dusty three-cornered hat, in which was stuck the longest tail feather of a rooster.

Then the old dame stood the figure up in a corner of her cottage and chuckled to behold its yellow semblance of a visage, with its nobby little nose thrust into the air. It had a strangely self-satisfied aspect, and seemed to say, 'Come, look at me!'

'And you are well worth looking at, that's a fact!' quoth Mother Rigby, in admiration at her own handiwork. 'I've made many a puppet since I've been a witch; but methinks this is the finest of them all. 'Tis almost too good for a scarecrow. And, by the by, I'll just fill a fresh pipe of tobacco, and then take him out to the corn-patch.'

While filling her pipe, the old woman continued to gaze with almost motherly affection at the figure in the corner. To say the truth, whether it was chance, or skill, or downright witchcraft, there was something wonderfully human in this ridiculous shape, bedizened with its tattered finery; and as for the countenance, it appeared to shrivel its yellow

surface into a grin—a funny kind of expression betwixt scorn and merriment, as if it understood itself to be a jest at mankind. The more Mother Rigby looked the better she was pleased.

‘Dickon,’ cried she sharply, ‘another coal for my pipe!’

Hardly had she spoken, than, just as before, there was a red glowing coal on the top of the tobacco. She drew in a long whiff and puffed it forth again into the bar of morning sunshine which struggled through the one dusty pane of her cottage window. Mother Rigby always liked to flavour her pipe with a coal of fire from the particular chimney-corner whence this had been brought. But where that chimney-corner might be, or who brought the coal from it—further than that the invisible messenger seemed to respond to the name of Dickon—I cannot tell.

‘That puppet yonder,’ thought Mother Rigby, still with her eyes fixed on the scarecrow, ‘is too good a piece of work to stand all summer in a corn-patch, frightening away the crows and blackbirds. He’s capable of better things. Why, I’ve danced with a worse one, when partners happened to be scarce, at our witch meetings in the forest! What if I should let him take his chance among the other men of straw and empty fellows who go bustling about the world?’

The old witch took three or four more whiffs of her pipe and smiled.

‘He’ll meet plenty of his brethren at every street corner!’ continued she. ‘Well; I didn’t mean to dabble in witchcraft to-day, further than the lighting of my pipe; but a witch I am, and a witch I’m likely to be, and there’s no use trying to shirk it. I’ll make a man of my scarecrow, were it only for the joke’s sake!’

While muttering these words Mother Rigby took the pipe from her own mouth and thrust it into the crevice which represented the same feature in the pumpkin visage of the scarecrow.

‘Puff, darling, puff!’ said she. ‘Puff away, my fine fellow! your life depends on it!’

This was a strange exhortation, undoubtedly, to be addressed to a mere nothing of sticks, straw, and old clothes, with nothing better than a shrivelled pumpkin for a head; as we know to have been the scarecrow’s case.

Nevertheless, as we must carefully hold in remembrance, Mother Rigby was a witch of singular power and dexterity; and, keeping this fact duly before our minds, we shall see nothing beyond credibility in the remarkable incidents of our story. Indeed, the great difficulty will be at once got over, if we can only bring ourselves to believe that, as soon as the old dame bade him puff, there came a whiff of smoke from the scarecrow's mouth. It was the very feeblest of whiffs, to be sure; but it was followed by another, and another, each more decided than the preceding one.

'Puff away, my pet! puff away, my pretty one!' Mother Rigby kept repeating with her pleasantest smile. 'It is the breath of life to ye; and that you may take my word for.'

Beyond all question the pipe was bewitched. There must have been a spell either in the tobacco or in the fiercely-glowing coal that so mysteriously burned on the top of it, or in the pungently-aromatic smoke which exhaled from the kindled weed. The figure, after a few doubtful attempts, at length blew forth a volley of smoke extending all the way from the obscure corner into the bar of sunshine. There it eddied and melted away among the motes of dust. It seemed a convulsive effort; for the two or three next whiffs were fainter, although the coal still glowed and threw a gleam over the scarecrow's visage. The old witch clapped her skinny hands together, and smiled encouragingly upon her handiwork. She saw that the charm worked well. The shrivelled, yellow face, which heretofore had been no face at all, had already a thin, fantastic haze, as it were, of human likeness, shifting to and fro across it; sometimes vanishing entirely, but growing more perceptible than ever with the next whiff from the pipe. The whole figure, in a like manner, assumed a show of life, such as we impart to ill-defined shapes among the clouds, and half deceive ourselves with the pastime of our own fancy.

If we must needs pry closely into the matter, it may be doubted whether there was any real change, after all, in the sordid, worn-out, worthless, and ill-jointed substance of the scarecrow, but merely a spectral illusion, and a cunning effect of light and shade so coloured and contrived as to delude the eyes of most men. The miracles of witchcraft seem always to have had a very shallow subtlety; and, at

least, if the above explanation do not hit the truth of the process, I can suggest no better.

'Well puffed, my pretty lad!' still cried old Mother Rigby. 'Come, another good stout whiff, and let it be with might and main. Puff for thy life, I tell thee! Puff out of the very bottom of thy heart, if any heart thou hast, or any bottom to it! Well done, again! Thou didst suck in that mouthful as if for the pure love of it.'

And then the witch beckoned to the scarecrow, throwing so much magnetic potency into her gesture that it seemed as if it must inevitably be obeyed, like the mystic call of the lodestone when it summons the iron.

'Why lurkest thou in the corner, lazy one?' said she. 'Step forth! Thou hast the world before thee!'

Upon my word, if the legend were not one which I heard on my grandmother's knee, and which had established its place among things credible before my childish judgement could analyse its probability, I question whether I should have the face to tell it now.

In obedience to Mother Rigby's word, and extending its arm as if to reach her outstretched hand, the figure made a step forward—a kind of hitch and jerk, however, rather than a step,—then tottered and almost lost its balance. What could the witch expect? It was nothing, after all, but a scarecrow stuck upon two sticks. But the strong-willed old beldam scowled, and beckoned, and flung the energy of her purpose so forcibly at this poor combination of rotten wood, and musty straw, and ragged garments, that it was compelled to show itself a man, in spite of the reality of things. So it stepped into the bar of sunshine. There it stood—poor devil of a contrivance that it was!—with only the thinnest vesture of human similitude about it, through which was evident the stiff, rickety, incongruous, faded, tattered, good-for-nothing patchwork of its substance, ready to sink in a heap upon the floor, as conscious of its own unworthiness to be erect. Shall I confess the truth? At its present point of vivification, the scarecrow reminds me of some of the lukewarm and abortive characters, composed of heterogeneous materials, used for the thousandth time, and never worth using, with which romance writers (and myself, no doubt, among the rest) have so overpeopled the world of fiction.



But the fierce old hag began to get angry and show a glimpse of her diabolic nature (like a snake's head, peeping with a hiss out of her bosom), at this pusillanimous behaviour of the thing which she had taken the trouble to put together.

'Puff away, wretch!' cried she, wrathfully. 'Puff, puff, puff, thou thing of straw and emptiness! thou rag or two! thou meal bag! thou pumpkin head! thou nothing! Where shall I find a name vile enough to call thee by? Puff, I say, and suck in thy fantastic life along with the smoke! else I snatch the pipe from thy mouth, and hurl thee where that red coal came from.'

Thus threatened, the unhappy scarecrow had nothing for it but to puff away for dear life. As need was, therefore, it applied itself lustily to the pipe and sent forth such abundant volleys of tobacco-smoke that the small kitchen became all vaporous. The one sunbeam struggled mistily through, and could but imperfectly define the image of the cracked and dusty window pane on the opposite wall. Mother Rigby, meanwhile, with one brown arm akimbo and the other stretched towards the figure, loomed grimly amid the obscurity with such port and expression as when she was wont to heave a ponderous nightmare on her victims and stand at the bedside to enjoy their agony. In fear and trembling did this poor scarecrow puff. But its efforts, it must be acknowledged, served an excellent purpose, for, with each successive whiff, the figure lost more and more of its dizzy and perplexing tenuity and seemed to take denser substance. Its very garments, moreover, partook of the magical change, and shone with the gloss of novelty and glistened with the skilfully embroidered gold that had long been rent away. And, half revealed among the smoke, a yellow visage bent its lustreless eyes on Mother Rigby.

At last the old witch clinched her fist and shook it at the figure. Not that she was positively angry, but merely acting on the principle—perhaps untrue, or not the only truth, though as high a one as Mother Rigby could be expected to attain—that feeble and torpid natures, being incapable of better inspiration, must be stirred up by fear. But here was the crisis. Should she fail in what she now sought to effect, it was her ruthless purpose to scatter the miserable simulacra into its original elements.

'Thou hast a man's aspect,' said she, sternly. 'Have also the echo and mockery of a voice! I bid thee speak!'

The scarecrow gasped, struggled, and at length emitted a murmur, which was so incorporated with its smoky breath that you could scarcely tell whether it were indeed a voice or only a whiff of tobacco. Some narrators of this legend hold the opinion that Mother Rigby's conjurations and the fierceness of her will had compelled a familiar spirit into the figure, and that the voice was his.

'Mother,' mumbled the poor stifled voice, 'be not so awful with me! I would fain speak, but being without wits, what can I say?'

'Thou canst speak, darling, canst thou?' cried Mother Rigby, relaxing her grim countenance into a smile. 'And what shalt thou say, quotha! Say, indeed! Art thou of the brotherhood of the empty skull, and demandest of me what thou shalt say? Thou shalt say a thousand things, and saying them a thousand times over, thou shalt still have said nothing! Be not afraid, I tell thee! When thou comest into the world (whither I purpose sending thee forthwith), thou shalt not lack the wherewithal to talk. Talk! Why, thou shalt babble like a mill-stream, if thou wilt. Thou hast brains enough for that, I trow!'

'At your service, mother,' responded the figure.

'And that was well said, my pretty one,' answered Mother Rigby. 'Then thou speakest like thyself and meant nothing. Thou shalt have a hundred such set phrases, and five hundred to the boot of them. And now, darling, I have taken so much pains with thee, and thou art so beautiful, that, by my troth, I love thee better than any witch's puppet in the world; and I've made them of all sorts—clay, wax, straw, sticks, night fog, morning mist, sea foam, and chimney smoke. But thou art the very best. So give heed to what I say.'

'Yes, kind mother,' said the figure, 'with all my heart!'

'With all thy heart!' cried the old witch, setting her hands to her sides and laughing loudly. 'Thou hast such a pretty way of speaking. With all thy heart! And thou didst put thy hand to the left side of thy waistcoat, as if thou really hadst one!'

So now, in high good humour with this fantastic contrivance of hers, Mother Rigby told the scarecrow that it must

go and play its part in the great world, where not one man in a hundred, she affirmed, was gifted with more real substance than itself. And, that he might hold up his head with the best of them, she endowed him, on the spot, with an unreckonable amount of wealth. It consisted partly of a gold mine in Eldorado, and of ten thousand shares in a broken bubble, and of half a million acres of vineyard at the North Pole, and of a castle in the air, and a chateau in Spain, together with all the rents and income therefrom accruing. She further made over to him the cargo of a certain ship, laden with salt of Cadiz, which she herself, by her necromantic arts, had caused to founder, ten years before, in the deepest part of mid-ocean. If the salt were not dissolved, and could be brought to market, it would fetch a pretty penny among the fishermen. That he might not lack ready money, she gave him a copper farthing of Birmingham manufacture, being all the coin she had about her, and likewise a great deal of brass, which she applied to his forehead, thus making it yellower than ever.

‘With that brass alone,’ quoth Mother Rigby, ‘thou canst pay thy way all over the earth. Kiss me, pretty darling! I have done my best for thee.’

Furthermore, that the adventurer might lack no possible advantage towards a fair start in life, this excellent old dame gave him a token by which he was to introduce himself to a certain magistrate, member of the council, merchant, and elder of the church (the four capacities constituting but one man), who stood at the head of society in the neighbouring metropolis. The token was neither more nor less than a single word, which Mother Rigby whispered to the scarecrow, and which the scarecrow was to whisper to the merchant.

‘Gouty as the old fellow is, he’ll run thy errands for thee when once thou hast given him that word in his ear,’ said the old witch. ‘Mother Rigby knows the worshipful Justice Gookin, and the worshipful Justice knows Mother Rigby!’

Here the witch thrust her wrinkled face close to the puppet’s, chuckling irrepressibly, and fidgeting all through her system, with delight at the idea which she meant to communicate.

‘The worshipful Master Gookin,’ whispered she, ‘hath a comely maiden to his daughter. And hark ye, my pet!

Thou hast a fair outside, and a pretty wit enough of thine own. Yea, a pretty wit enough! Thou wilt think better of it when thou hast seen more of other people's wits. Now, with thy outside and thy inside, thou art the very man to win a young girl's heart. Never doubt it! I tell thee it shall be so. Put but a bold face on the matter, sigh, smile, flourish thy hat, thrust forth thy leg like a dancing master, put thy right hand to the left side of thy waistcoat, and pretty Polly Gookin is thine own!

All this while the new creature had been sucking in and exhaling the vapoury fragrance of his pipe, and seemed now to continue this occupation as much for the enjoyment it afforded as because it was an essential condition of his existence. It was wonderful to see how exceedingly like a human being it behaved. Its eyes (for it appeared to possess a pair) were bent on Mother Rigby, and at suitable junctures it nodded or shook its head. Neither did it lack words proper for the occasion: 'Really! Indeed! Pray tell me! Is it possible! Upon my word! By no means! O! Ah! Hem!' and other such weighty utterances as imply attention, inquiry, acquiescence, or dissent on the part of the auditor. Even had you stood by and seen the scarecrow made you could scarcely have resisted the conviction that it perfectly understood the cunning counsels which the old witch poured into its counterfeit of an ear. The more earnestly it applied its lips to the pipe the more distinctly was its human likeness stamped among visible realities, the more sagacious grew its expression, the more lifelike its gestures and movements, and the more intelligibly audible its voice. Its garments, too, glistened so much the brighter with an illusory magnificence. The very pipe, in which burned the spell of all this wonder-work, ceased to appear as a smoke-blackened earthen stump, and became a meer-schaum, with painted bowl and amber mouthpiece.

It might be apprehended, however, that as the life of the illusion seemed identical with the vapour of the pipe, it would terminate simultaneously with the reduction of the tobacco to ashes. But the Beldam foresaw the difficulty.

'Hold thou the pipe, my precious one,' said she, 'while I fill it for thee again.'

It was sorrowful to behold how the fine gentleman began to fade back into a scarecrow while Mother Rigby shook

the ashes out of the pipe and proceeded to replenish it from her tobacco box.

'Dickon,' cried she, in her high, sharp tone, 'another coal for this pipe!'

No sooner said than the intensely red speck of fire was glowing within the pipe bowl; and the scarecrow, without waiting for the witch's bidding, applied the tube to his lips and drew in a few short, convulsive whiffs, which soon, however, became regular and equable.

'Now, my own heart's darling,' quoth Mother Rigby, 'whatever may happen to thee, thou must stick to thy pipe. Thy life is in it; and that, at least, thou knowest well, if thou knowest nought besides. Stick to thy pipe, I say! Smoke, puff, blow thy cloud; and tell the people, if any question be made, that it is for thy health, and that so the physician orders thee to do. And, sweet one, when thou shalt find thy pipe getting low, go apart into some corner, and (first filling thyself with smoke), cry sharply, "Dickon, a fresh pipe of tobacco!" and "Dickon, another coal for my pipe!" and have it into thy pretty mouth as speedily as may be. Else, instead of a gallant gentleman in a gold-laced coat, thou wilt be but a jumble of sticks and tattered clothes, and a bag of straw, and a withered pumpkin! Now depart, my treasure, and good luck go with thee!'

'Never fear, mother!' said the figure, in a stout voice, and sending forth a courageous whiff of smoke. 'I will thrive, if an honest man and a gentleman may!'

'O, thou wilt be the death of me!' cried the old witch, convulsed with laughter. 'That was well said. If an honest man and a gentleman may! Thou playest thy part to perfection. Get along with thee for a smart fellow; and I will wager on thy head, as a man of pith and substance, with a brain, and what they call a heart, and all else that a man should have, against any other thing on two legs. I hold myself a better witch than yesterday, for thy sake. Did not I make thee? And I defy any witch in New England to make such another! Here; take my staff along with thee!'

The staff, though it was but a plain oaken stick, immediately took the aspect of a gold-headed cane.

'That gold head has as much sense in it as thine own,' said Mother Rigby, 'and it will guide thee straight to

worshipful Master Gookin's door. Get thee gone, my pretty pet, my darling, my precious one, my treasure; and if any ask thy name, it is Feathertop. For thou hast a feather in thy hat, and I have thrust a handful of feathers into the hollow of thy head, and thy wig too is of the fashion they call Feathertop—so be Feathertop thy name!’

And, issuing from the cottage, Feathertop strode manfully towards town. Mother Rigby stood at the threshold, well pleased to see how the sunbeams glistened on him, as if all his magnificence were real, and how diligently and lovingly he smoked his pipe, and how handsomely he walked, in spite of a little stiffness of his legs. She watched him until out of sight, and threw a witch benediction after her darling, when a turn of the road snatched him from her view.

Betimes in the forenoon, when the principal street of the neighbouring town was just at its acme of life and bustle, a stranger of very distinguished figure was seen on the sidewalk. His port as well as his garments betokened nothing short of nobility. He wore a richly-embroidered plum-coloured coat, a waistcoat of costly velvet magnificently adorned with golden foliage, a pair of splendid scarlet breeches, and the finest and glossiest of white silk stockings. His head was covered with a peruke, so daintily powdered and adjusted that it would have been sacrilege to disorder it with a hat; which, therefore (and it was a gold-laced hat, set off with a snowy feather), he carried beneath his arm. On the breast of his coat glistened a star. He managed his gold-headed cane with an airy grace peculiar to the fine gentlemen of the period; and to give the highest possible finish to his equipment, he had lace ruffles at his wrist, of a most ethereal delicacy, sufficiently avouching how idle and aristocratic must be the hands which they half concealed.

It was a remarkable point in the accoutrement of this brilliant personage that he held in his left hand a fantastic kind of pipe, with an exquisitely painted bowl and an amber mouthpiece. This he applied to his lips as often as every five or six paces, and inhaled a deep whiff of smoke, which, after being retained a moment in his lungs, might be seen to eddy gracefully from his mouth and nostrils.

As may well be supposed, the street was all astir to find out the stranger's name.

'It is some great nobleman, beyond question,' said one of the townspeople. 'Do you see the star at his breast?'

'Nay; it is too bright to be seen,' said another. 'Yes; he must needs be a nobleman, as you say. But by what conveyance, think you, can his lordship have voyaged or travelled hither? There has been no vessel from the old country for a month past; and if he have arrived overland from the southward, pray where are his attendants and equipage?'

'He needs no equipage to set off his rank,' remarked a third. 'If he came among us in rags, nobility would shine through a hole in his elbow. I never saw such dignity of aspect. He has the old Norman blood in his veins, I warrant him.'

'I rather take him to be a Dutchman, or one of your high Germans,' said another citizen. 'The men of those countries have always the pipe at their mouths.'

'And so has a Turk,' answered his companion. 'But, in my judgement, this stranger hath been bred at the French court, and hath there learned politeness and grace of manner, which none understand so well as the nobility of France. That gait, now! A vulgar spectator might deem it stiff—he might call it a hitch and jerk—but, to my eye, it hath an unspeakable majesty, and must have been acquired by constant observation of the deportment of the Grand Monarque. The stranger's character and office are evident enough. He is a French ambassador, come to treat with our rulers about the cession of Canada.'

'More probably a Spaniard,' said another, 'and hence his yellow complexion; or, most likely, he is from the Havana, or from some port on the Spanish Main, and comes to make investigation about the piracies which our governor is thought to connive at. Those settlers in Peru and Mexico have skins as yellow as the gold which they dig out of their mines.'

'Yellow or not,' cried a lady, 'he is a beautiful man!—so tall, so slender! such a fine, noble face, with so well shaped a nose, and all that delicacy of expression about the mouth! And, bless me, how bright his star is! It positively shoots out flames!'

'So do your eyes, fair lady,' said the stranger, with a bow and a flourish of his pipe; for he was just passing at the instant. 'Upon my honour, they have quite dazzled me.'

'Was ever so original and exquisite a compliment?' murmured the lady in an ecstasy of delight.

Amid the general admiration excited by the stranger's appearance there were only two dissenting voices. One was that of an impertinent cur, which, after snuffing at the heels of the glistening figure, put its tail between its legs and skulked into its master's backyard, vociferating an execrable howl. The other dissentient was a young child, who squalled at the fullest stretch of his lungs, and babbled some unintelligible nonsense about a pumpkin.

Feathertop meanwhile pursued his way along the street. Except for the few complimentary words to the lady, and now and then a slight inclination of the head in requital of the profound reverences of the bystanders, he seemed wholly absorbed in his pipe. There needed no other proof of his rank and consequence than the perfect equanimity with which he comported himself, while the curiosity and admiration of the town swelled almost into clamour around him. With a crowd gathering behind his footsteps, he finally reached the mansion house of the worshipful Justice Gookin, entered the gate, ascended the steps of the front door, and knocked. In the interim, before his summons was answered, the stranger was observed to shake the ashes out of his pipe.

'What did he say in that sharp voice?' inquired one of the spectators.

'Nay, I know not,' answered his friend. 'But the sun dazzles my eyes strangely. How dim and faded his lordship looks all of a sudden! Bless my wits, what is the matter with me?'

'The wonder is,' said the other, 'that his pipe, which was out only an instant ago, should be all alight again, and with the reddest coal I ever saw. There is something mysterious about this stranger. What a whiff of smoke was that! Dim and faded did you call him? Why, as he turns about the star on his breast is all ablaze.'

'It is, indeed,' said his companion, 'and it will go near to dazzle pretty Polly Gookin, whom I see peeping at it out of the chamber window.'

The door being now opened, Feathertop turned to the crowd, made a stately bend of his body like a great man acknowledging the reverence of the meaner sort, and



vanished into the house. There was a mysterious kind of a smile, if it might not be better called a grin or grimace, upon his visage ; but, of all the throng that beheld him, not an individual appears to have possessed insight enough to detect the illusive character of the stranger except a little child and a cur dog.

Our legend here loses somewhat of its continuity, and, passing over the preliminary explanation between Feathertop and the merchant, goes in quest of the pretty Polly Gookin. She was a damsel of a soft, round figure, with light hair and blue eyes, and a fair, rosy face, which seemed neither very shrewd nor very simple. This young lady had caught a glimpse of the glistening stranger while standing at the threshold, and had forthwith put on a laced cap, a string of beads, her finest kerchief, and her stiffest damask petticoat, in preparation for the interview. Hurrying from her chamber to the parlour, she had ever since been viewing herself in the large looking-glass and practising pretty airs—now a smile, now a ceremonious dignity of aspect, and now a softer smile than the former, kissing her hand likewise, tossing her head, and managing her fan ; while within the mirror an unsubstantial little maid repeated every gesture and did all the foolish things that Polly did, but without making her ashamed of them. In short, it was the fault of pretty Polly's ability rather than her will if she failed to be as complete an artifice as the illustrious Feathertop himself ; and, when she thus tampered with her own simplicity, the witch's phantom might well hope to win her.

No sooner did Polly hear her father's gouty footsteps approaching the parlour door, accompanied with the stiff clatter of Feathertop's high-heeled shoes, than she seated herself bolt upright and innocently began warbling a song.

'Polly! daughter Polly!' cried the old merchant. 'Come hither, child.'

Master Gookin's aspect, as he opened the door, was doubtful and troubled.

'This gentleman,' continued he, presenting the stranger, 'is the Chevalier Feathertop,—nay, I beg his pardon, my Lord Feathertop,—who hath brought me a token of remembrance from an ancient friend of mine. Pay your duty to his lordship, child, and honour him as his quality deserves.'

After these few words of introduction the worshipful

magistrate immediately quitted the room. But, even in that brief moment, had the fair Polly glanced aside at her father instead of devoting herself wholly to the brilliant guest, she might have taken warning of some mischief nigh at hand. The old man was nervous, fidgety, and very pale. Purposing a smile of courtesy, he had deformed his face with a sort of galvanic grin, which, when Feathertop's back was turned, he exchanged for a scowl, at the same time shaking his fist and stamping his gouty foot—an incivility which brought its retribution along with it. The truth appears to have been that Mother Rigby's word of introduction, whatever it might be, had operated far more on the rich merchant's fears than on his good will. Moreover, being a man of wonderfully acute observation, he had noticed that the painted figures on the bowl of Feathertop's pipe were in motion. Looking more closely, he became convinced that these figures were a party of little demons, each duly provided with horns and a tail, and dancing hand in hand, with gestures of diabolical merriment, round the circumference of the pipe bowl. As if to confirm his suspicions, while Master Gookin ushered his guest along a dusky passage from his private room to the parlour, the star on Feathertop's breast had scintillated actual flames, and threw a flickering gleam upon the wall, the ceiling, and the floor.

With such sinister prognostics manifesting themselves on all hands, it is not to be marvelled at that the merchant should have felt that he was committing his daughter to a very questionable acquaintance. He cursed, in his secret soul, the insinuating elegance of Feathertop's manners, as this brilliant personage bowed, smiled, put his hand on his heart, inhaled a long whiff from his pipe, and enriched the atmosphere with the smoky vapour of a fragrant and visible sigh. Gladly would poor Master Gookin have thrust his dangerous guest into the street; but there was a constraint and terror within him. This respectable old gentleman, we fear, at an earlier period of life, had given some pledge or other to the evil principle, and perhaps was now to redeem it by the sacrifice of his daughter.

It so happened that the parlour door was partly of glass, shaded by a silken curtain, the folds of which hung a little awry. So strong was the merchant's interest in witnessing

what was to ensue between the fair Polly and the gallant Feathertop that after quitting the room he could by no means refrain from peeping through the crevice of the curtain.

But there was nothing very miraculous to be seen; nothing—except the trifles previously noticed—to confirm the idea of a supernatural peril environing the pretty Polly. The stranger, it is true, was evidently a thorough and practised man of the world, systematic and self-possessed, and therefore the sort of a person to whom a parent ought not to confide a simple, young girl without due watchfulness for the result. The worthy magistrate, who had been conversant with all degrees and qualities of mankind, could not but perceive every motion and gesture of the distinguished Feathertop came in its proper place; nothing had been left rude or native in him; a well-digested conventionalism had incorporated itself thoroughly with his substance and transformed him into a work of art. Perhaps it was this peculiarity that invested him with a species of ghastliness and awe. It is the effect of anything completely and consummately artificial, in human shape, that the person impresses us as an unreality and as having hardly pith enough to cast a shadow upon the floor. As regarded Feathertop, all this resulted in a wild, extravagant, and fantastical impression, as if his life and being were akin to the smoke that curled upward from his pipe.

But pretty Polly Gookin felt not thus. The pair were now promenading the room; Feathertop with his dainty stride and no less dainty grimace; the girl with a native maidenly grace, just touched, not spoiled, by a slightly affected manner, which seemed caught from the perfect artifice of her companion. The longer the interview continued, the more charmed was pretty Polly, until, within the first quarter of an hour (as the old magistrate noted by his watch), she was evidently beginning to be in love. Nor need it have been witchcraft that subdued her in such a hurry; the poor child's heart, it may be, was so very fervent that it melted her with its own warmth as reflected from the hollow semblance of a lover. No matter what Feathertop said, his words found depth and reverberation in her ear; no matter what he did, his action was heroic to her eye. And by this time it is to be supposed there was a blush on Polly's cheek, a tender smile about her mouth, and

a liquid softness in her glance; while the star kept coruscating on Feathertop's breast, and the little demons careered with more frantic merriment than ever about the circumference of his pipe bowl. O pretty Polly Gookin, why should these imps rejoice so madly that a silly maiden's heart was about to be given to a shadow! Is it so unusual a misfortune, so rare a triumph?

By and by Feathertop paused, and, throwing himself into an imposing attitude, seemed to summon the fair girl to survey his figure and resist him longer if she could. His star, his embroidery, his buckles glowed at that instant with unutterable splendour; the picturesque hues of his attire took a richer depth of colouring; there was a gleam and polish over his whole presence betokening the perfect witchery of well-ordered manners. The maiden raised her eyes and suffered them to linger upon her companion with a bashful and admiring gaze. Then, as if desirous of judging what value her own simple comeliness might have side by side with so much brilliancy, she cast a glance towards the full-length looking-glass in front of which they happened to be standing. It was one of the truest plates in the world, and incapable of flattery. No sooner did the images therein reflected meet Polly's eye than she shrieked, shrank from the stranger's side, gazed at him for a moment in the wildest dismay, and sank insensible upon the floor. Feathertop likewise had looked towards the mirror, and there beheld, not the glittering mockery of his outside show, but a picture of the sordid patchwork of his real composition, stripped of all witchcraft.

The wretched simulacrum! We almost pity him. He threw up his arms with an expression of despair that went further than any of his previous manifestations towards vindicating his claims to be reckoned human; for, perchance the only time since this so often empty and deceptive life of mortals began its course, an illusion had seen and fully recognized itself.

Mother Rigby was seated by her kitchen hearth in the twilight of this eventful day, and had just shaken the ashes out of a new pipe, when she heard a hurried tramp along the road. Yet it did not seem so much the tramp of human footsteps as the clatter of sticks or the rattling of dry bones.

‘Ha!’ thought the old witch, ‘what step is that? Whose skeleton is out of its grave now, I wonder?’

A figure burst headlong into the cottage door. It was Feathertop! His pipe was still alight; the star still flamed upon his breast, nor had he lost, in any degree or manner that could be estimated, the aspect that assimilated him with our mortal brotherhood. But yet, in some indescribable way (as is the case with all that has deluded us when once found out), the poor reality was felt beneath the cunning artifice.

‘What has gone wrong?’ demanded the witch. ‘Did yonder sniffling hypocrite thrust my darling from his door? The villain! I’ll set twenty fiends to torment him till he offer thee his daughter on his bended knees!’

‘No, mother,’ said Feathertop despondingly; ‘it was not that.’

‘Did the girl scorn my precious one?’ asked Mother Rigby, her fierce eyes glowing like two coals of Tophet. ‘I’ll cover her face with pimples! Her nose shall be as red as the coal in thy pipe! Her front teeth shall drop out! In a week hence she shall not be worth thy having!’

‘Leave her alone, mother,’ answered poor Feathertop; ‘the girl was half won; and methinks a kiss from her sweet lips might have made me altogether human. But,’ he added, after a brief pause and then a howl of self-contempt, ‘I’ve seen myself for the wretched, ragged, empty thing I am! I’ll exist no longer!’

Snatching the pipe from his mouth, he flung it with all his might against the chimney, and at the same instant sank upon the floor, a medley of straw and tattered garments, with some sticks protruding from the heap, and a shrivelled pumpkin in the midst. The eyeholes were now lustreless; but the rudely carved gap, that just before had been a mouth, still seemed to twist itself into a despairing grin, and was so far human.

‘Poor fellow!’ quoth Mother Rigby, with a rueful glance at the relics of her ill-fated contrivance. ‘My poor, dear, pretty Feathertop! There are thousands upon thousands of coxcombs and charlatans in the world, made up of just such a jumble of worn-out, forgotten, and good-for-nothing trash as he was! Yet they live in fair repute, and never see themselves for what they are. And why should my poor

puppet be the only one to know himself and perish for it?’

While thus muttering, the witch had filled a fresh pipe of tobacco, and held the stem between her fingers, as doubtful whether to thrust it into her own mouth or Feathertop’s.

‘Poor Feathertop!’ she continued. ‘I could easily give him another chance and send him forth again to-morrow. But no; his feelings are too tender, his sensibilities too deep. He seems to have too much heart to bustle for his own advantage in such an empty and heartless world. Well! well! I’ll make a scarecrow of him after all. ’Tis an innocent and a useful vocation, and will suit my darling well; and, if each of his human brethren had as fit a one, ’twould be the better for mankind; and as for this pipe of tobacco, I need it more than he.’

So saying, Mother Rigby put the stem between her lips, ‘Dickon!’ cried she, in her high, sharp tone, ‘another coal for my pipe!’

*From Mosses from an Old Manse.*

# EDGAR ALLAN POE

1809-1849

## THE GOLD BUG

What ho ! what ho ! this fellow is dancing mad !  
He hath been bitten by the Tarantula.

*All in the Wrong.*

MANY years ago I contracted an intimacy with a Mr. William Legrand. He was of an ancient Huguenot family, and had once been wealthy ; but a series of misfortunes had reduced him to want. To avoid the mortification consequent upon his disasters, he left New Orleans, the city of his forefathers, and took up his residence at Sullivan's Island near Charleston, South Carolina.

This island is a very singular one. It consists of little else than the sea sand, and is about three miles long. Its breadth at no point exceeds a quarter of a mile. It is separated from the mainland by a scarcely perceptible creek, oozing its way through a wilderness of reeds and slime, a favourite resort of the marsh-hen. The vegetation, as might be supposed, is scant, or at least dwarfish. No trees of any magnitude are to be seen. Near the western extremity, where Fort Moultrie stands, and where are some miserable frame buildings, tenanted, during summer, by the fugitives from Charleston dust and fever, may be found, indeed, the bristly palmetto ; but the whole island, with the exception of this western point, and a line of hard, white beach on the sea-coast, is covered with a dense undergrowth of the sweet myrtle, so much prized by the horticulturists of England. The shrub here often attains the height of fifteen or twenty feet and forms an almost impenetrable coppice, burdening the air with its fragrance.

In the inmost recesses of this coppice, not far from the eastern or more remote end of the island, Legrand had built himself a small hut, which he occupied when I first, by mere accident, made his acquaintance. This soon ripened into friendship—for there was much in the recluse to excite interest and esteem. I found him well educated, with unusual powers of mind, but infected with misanthropy, and subject to perverse moods of alternate enthusiasm and melancholy. He had with him many books, but rarely employed them. His chief amusements were gunning and fishing, or sauntering along the beach and through the myrtles, in quest of shells or entomological specimens;—his collection of the latter might have been envied by a Swammerdam. In these excursions he was usually accompanied by an old negro, called Jupiter, who had been manumitted before the reverses of the family, but who could be induced, neither by threats nor by promises, to abandon what he considered his right of attendance upon the footsteps of his young 'Massa Will'. It is not improbable that the relatives of Legrand, conceiving him to be somewhat unsettled in intellect, had contrived to instil this obstinacy into Jupiter, with a view to the supervision and guardianship of the wanderer.

The winters in the latitude of Sullivan's Island are seldom very severe, and in the fall of the year it is a rare event indeed when a fire is considered necessary. About the middle of October, 18—, there occurred, however, a day of remarkable chilliness. Just before sunset I scrambled my way through the evergreens to the hut of my friend, whom I had not visited for several weeks—my residence being, at that time, in Charleston, a distance of nine miles from the island, while the facilities of passage and re-passage were very far behind those of the present day. Upon reaching the hut I rapped, as was my custom, and getting no reply, sought for the key where I knew it was secreted, unlocked the door and went in. A fine fire was blazing upon the hearth. It was a novelty, and by no means an ungrateful one. I threw off an overcoat, took an arm-chair by the crackling logs, and awaited patiently the arrival of my hosts.

Soon after dark they arrived, and gave me a most cordial



welcome. Jupiter, grinning from ear to ear, bustled about to prepare some marsh-hens for supper. Legrand was in one of his fits—how else shall I term them?—of enthusiasm. He had found an unknown bivalve, forming a new genus, and, more than this, he had hunted down and secured, with Jupiter's assistance, a *scarabaeus* which he believed to be totally new, but in respect to which he wished to have my opinion on the morrow.

'And why not to-night?' I asked, rubbing my hands over the blaze, and wishing the whole tribe of *scarabaei* at the devil.

'Ah, if I had only known you were here!' said Legrand, 'but it's so long since I saw you; and how could I foresee that you would pay me a visit this very night of all others? As I was coming home I met Lieutenant G——, from the fort, and, very foolishly, I lent him the bug; so it will be impossible for you to see it until the morning. Stay here to-night, and I will send Jup down for it at sunrise. It is the loveliest thing in creation!'

'What?—sunrise?'

'Nonsense! no!—the bug. It is of a brilliant gold colour—about the size of a large hickory-nut—with two jet-black spots near one extremity of the back, and another, somewhat longer, at the other. The *antennae* are——'

'Dey aint *no* tin in him, Massa Will, I keep a-tellin on you,' here interrupted Jupiter; 'de bug is a goole bug, solid, ebery bit of him, inside and all, sop him wing—neber feel half so hebby a bug in my life.'

'Well, suppose it is, Jup,' replied Legrand, somewhat more earnestly, it seemed to me, than the case demanded, 'is that any reason for your letting the birds burn? The colour'—here he turned to me—'is really almost enough to warrant Jupiter's idea. You never saw a more brilliant metallic lustre than the scales emit—but of this you cannot judge till to-morrow. In the meantime I can give you some idea of the shape.' Saying this, he seated himself at a small table, on which were a pen and ink, but no paper. He looked for some in a drawer, but found none.

'Never mind,' said he at length, 'this will answer'; and he drew from his waistcoat pocket a scrap of what I took to be very dirty foolscap, and made upon it a rough drawing

with the pen. While he did this, I retained my seat by the fire, for I was still chilly. When the design was complete, he handed it to me without rising. As I received it, a loud growl was heard, succeeded by a scratching at the door. Jupiter opened it, and a large Newfoundland, belonging to Legrand, rushed in, leaped upon my shoulders, and loaded me with caresses; for I had shown him much attention during previous visits. When his gambols were over, I looked at the paper, and, to speak the truth, found myself not a little puzzled at what my friend had depicted.

'Well!' I said, after contemplating it for some minutes, 'this is a strange *scarabaeus*, I must confess: new to me: never saw anything like it before—unless it was a skull, or a death's-head—which it more nearly resembles than anything else that has come under *my* observation.'

'A death's-head!' echoed Legrand. 'Oh—yes—well, it has something of that appearance upon paper, no doubt. The two upper black spots look like eyes, eh? and the longer one at the bottom like a mouth—and then the shape of the whole is oval.'

'Perhaps so,' said I; 'but, Legrand, I fear you are no artist. I must wait until I see the beetle itself, if I am to form any idea of its personal appearance.'

'Well, I don't know,' said he, a little nettled, 'I draw tolerably—*should* do it at least—have had good masters, and flatter myself that I am not quite a block-head.'

'But, my dear fellow, you are joking then,' said I, 'this is a very passable *skull*—indeed, I may say that it is a very *excellent* skull, according to the vulgar notions about such specimens of physiology—and your *scarabaeus* must be the queerest *scarabaeus* in the world if it resembles it. Why, we may get up a very thrilling bit of superstition upon this hint. I presume you will call the bug *scarabaeus caput hominis*, or something of that kind—there are many similar titles in the Natural Histories. But where are the *antennae* you spoke of?'

'The *antennae*!' said Legrand, who seemed to be getting unaccountably warm upon the subject; 'I am sure you must see the *antennae*. I made them as distinct as they are in the original insect, and I presume that is sufficient.'

'Well, well,' I said, 'perhaps you have—still I don't see

them'; and I handed him the paper without additional remark, not wishing to ruffle his temper; but I was much surprised at the turn affairs had taken; his ill humour puzzled me—and, as for the drawing of the beetle, there were positively *no antennae* visible, and the whole *did* bear a very close resemblance to the ordinary cuts of a death's-head.

He received the paper very peevishly, and was about to crumple it, apparently to throw it in the fire, when a casual glance at the design seemed suddenly to rivet his attention. In an instant his face grew violently red—in another as excessively pale. For some minutes he continued to scrutinize the drawing minutely where he sat. At length he arose, took a candle from the table, and proceeded to seat himself upon a sea-chest in the farthest corner of the room. Here again he made an anxious examination of the paper, turning it in all directions. He said nothing, however, and his conduct greatly astonished me; yet I thought it prudent not to exacerbate the growing moodiness of his temper by any comment. Presently he took from his coat pocket a wallet, placed the paper carefully in it, and deposited both in a writing-desk, which he locked. He now grew more composed in his demeanour; but his original air of enthusiasm had quite disappeared. Yet he seemed not so much sulky as abstracted. As the evening wore away he became more and more absorbed in reverie, from which no sallies of mine could arouse him. It had been my intention to pass the night at the hut, as I had frequently done before, but, seeing my host in this mood, I deemed it proper to take leave. He did not press me to remain, but, as I departed, he shook my hand with even more than his usual cordiality.

It was about a month after this (and during the interval I had seen nothing of Legrand) when I received a visit, at Charleston, from his man, Jupiter. I had never seen the good old negro look so dispirited, and I feared that some serious disaster had befallen my friend.

'Well, Jup,' said I, 'what is the matter now?—how is your master?'

'Why, to speak de troof, massa, him not so berry well as mought be.'

'Not well! I am truly sorry to hear it. What does he complain of?'

'Dar! dat's it!—him neber plain of notin—but him berry sick for all dat.'

'*Very* sick, Jupiter!—why didn't you say so at once? Is he confined to bed?'

'No, dat he aint!—he aint 'fin'd nowhar—dat's just whar de shoe pinch. My mind is got to be berry hebbly bout poor Massa Will.'

'Jupiter, I should like to understand what it is you are talking about. You say your master is sick. Hasn't he told you what ails him?'

'Why, massa, taint worf while for to git mad about de matter—Massa Will say noffin at all aint de matter wid him—but den what make him go about looking dis here way, wid he head down and he soldiers up, and as white as a gose? And den he keep a syphon all de time—'

'Keeps a what, Jupiter?'

'Keeps a syphon wid de figgurs on de slate—de queerest figgurs I ebber did see. Ise gettin to be skeered, I tell you. Hab for to keep mighty tight eye pon him noovers. Todder day he gib me slip fore de sun up and was gone de whole ob de blessed day. I had a big stick ready cut for to gib him deuced good beating when he did come—but Ise sich a fool dat I hadn't de heart arter all—he look so berry poorly.'

'Eh?—what?—ah yes!—upon the whole I think you had better not be too severe with the poor fellow—don't flog him, Jupiter—he can't very well stand it—but can you form no idea of what has occasioned this illness, or rather this change of conduct? Has anything unpleasant happened since I saw you?'

'No, massa, dey aint bin noffin unpleasant *since* den—'twas *fore* den I'm feared—'twas de berry day you was dare.'

'How? what do you mean?'

'Why, massa, I mean de bug—dare now.'

'The what?'

'De bug—I'm berry sartain dat Massa Will bin bit some—where bout de head by dat goole bug.'

'And what cause have you, Jupiter, for such a supposition?'

'Claws enuff, massa, and mouff too. I nebber did see

sich a deuced bug—he kick and he bite ebery ting what cum near him. Massa Will cotch him fuss, but had for to let him go gin mighty quick, I tell you—den was de time he must ha got de bite. I didn't like de look ob de bug mouff, myself, no how, so I wouldn't take hold ob him wid my finger, but I cotch him wid a piece ob paper dat I found. I wrap him up in de paper and stuff piece ob it in he mouff—dat was de way.'

'And you think, then, that your master was really bitten by the beetle, and that the bite made him sick?'

'I don't tink noffin about it—I nose it. What made him dream bout de goole so much, if taint cause he bit by de goole bug? Ise heerd bout dem goole bugs fore dis.'

'But how do you know he dreams about gold?'

'How I know? why, cause he talk about it in he sleep—dat's how I nose.'

'Well, Jup, perhaps you are right; but to what fortunate circumstance am I to attribute the honour of a visit from you to-day?'

'What de matter, massa?'

'Did you bring any message from Mr. Legrand?'

'No, massa, I bring dis here pissel'; and here Jupiter handed me a note which ran thus:—

'MY DEAR —, Why have I not seen you for so long a time? I hope you have not been so foolish as to take offence at any little *brusquerie* of mine; but no, that is improbable.

'Since I saw you I have had great cause for anxiety. I have something to tell you, yet scarcely know how to tell it, or whether I should tell it at all.

'I have not been quite well for some days past, and poor old Jup annoys me, almost beyond endurance, by his well-meant attentions. Would you believe it?—he had prepared a huge stick, the other day, with which to chastise me for giving him the slip, and spending the day, *solus*, among the hills on the mainland. I verily believe that my ill looks alone saved me a flogging.

'I have made no addition to my cabinet since we met.

'If you can, in any way, make it convenient, come over with Jupiter. *Do* come. I wish to see you *to-night*, upon

business of importance. I assure you that it is of the *highest* importance.—Ever yours,

‘WILLIAM LEGRAND.’

There was something in the tone of this note which gave me great uneasiness. Its whole style differed materially from that of Legrand. What could he be dreaming of? What new crotchet possessed his excitable brain? What ‘business of the highest importance’ could *he* possibly have to transact? Jupiter’s account of him boded no good. I dreaded lest the continued pressure of misfortune had, at length, fairly unsettled the reason of my friend. Without a moment’s hesitation, therefore, I prepared to accompany the negro.

Upon reaching the wharf, I noticed a scythe and three spades, all apparently new, lying in the bottom of the boat in which we were to embark.

‘What is the meaning of all this, Jup?’ I inquired.

‘Him syfe, massa, and spade.’

‘Very true; but what are they doing here?’

‘Him de syfe and de spade what Massa Will sis pon my buying for him in de town, and de debbil’s own lot of money I had to gib for em.’

‘But what, in the name of all that is mysterious, is your “Massa Will” going to do with scythes and spades?’

‘Dat’s more dan I know, and debbil take me if I don’t believe ’tis more dan he know, too. But it’s all cum oh de bug.’

Finding that no satisfaction was to be obtained of Jupiter, whose whole intellect seemed to be absorbed by ‘de bug,’ I now stepped into the boat and made sail. With a fair and strong breeze we soon ran into the little cove to the northward of Fort Moultrie, and a walk of some two miles brought us to the hut. It was about three in the afternoon when we arrived. Legrand had been awaiting us in eager expectation. He grasped my hand with a nervous *empressement* which alarmed me and strengthened the suspicions already entertained. His countenance was pale even to ghastliness, and his deep-set eyes glared with unnatural lustre. After some inquiries respecting his health, I asked him, not knowing what better to say, if he had yet obtained the *scarabæus* from Lieutenant G——.

'Oh yes,' he replied, colouring violently, 'I got it from him the next morning. Nothing should tempt me to part with that *scarabæus*. Do you know that Jupiter is quite right about it?'

'In what way?' I asked, with a sad foreboding at heart.

'In supposing it to be a bug of *real gold!*' He said this with an air of profound seriousness, and I felt inexpressibly shocked.

'This bug is to make my fortune,' he continued with a triumphant smile, 'to reinstate me in my family possessions. Is it any wonder, then, that I prize it? Since Fortune has thought fit to bestow it upon me, I have only to use it properly and I shall arrive at the gold of which it is the index. Jupiter, bring me that *scarabæus!*'

'What! de bug, massa? I'd rudder not go fer trubble dat bug—you mus git him for your own self.' Hereupon Legrand arose, with a grave and stately air, and brought me the beetle from a glass case in which it was enclosed. It was a beautiful *scarabæus*, and, at that time, unknown to naturalists—of course a great prize in a scientific point of view. There were two round black spots near one extremity of the back, and a long one near the other. The scales were exceedingly hard and glossy, with all the appearance of burnished gold. The weight of the insect was very remarkable, and, taking all things into consideration, I could hardly blame Jupiter for his opinion respecting it; but what to make of Legrand's concordance with that opinion, I could not, for the life of me, tell.

'I sent for you,' said he, in a grandiloquent tone, when I had completed my examination of the beetle, 'I sent for you, that I might have your counsel and assistance in furthering the views of Fate and of the bug——'

'My dear Legrand,' I cried, interrupting him, 'you are certainly unwell, and had better use some little precautions. You shall go to bed, and I will remain with you a few days, until you get over this. You are feverish and——'

'Feel my pulse,' said he.

I felt it, and, to say the truth, found not the slightest indication of fever.

'But you may be ill and yet have no fever. Allow me

this once to prescribe for you. In the first place, go to bed. In the next——'

'You are mistaken,' he interposed, 'I am as well as I can expect to be under the excitement which I suffer. If you really wish me well, you will relieve this excitement.'

'And how is this to be done?'

'Very easily. Jupiter and myself are going upon an expedition into the hills upon the mainland, and in this expedition we shall need the aid of some person in whom we can confide. You are the only one we can trust. Whether we succeed or fail, the excitement which you now perceive in me will be equally allayed.'

'I am anxious to oblige you in any way,' I replied; 'but do you mean to say that this infernal beetle has any connexion with your expedition into the hills?'

'It has.'

'Then, Legrand, I can become a party to no such absurd proceeding.'

'I am sorry—very sorry—for we shall have to try it by ourselves.'

'Try it by yourselves! The man is surely mad!—but stay!—how long do you propose to be absent?'

'Probably all night. We shall start immediately, and be back, at all events, by sunrise.'

'And will you promise me, upon your honour, that when this freak of yours is over, and the bug business (good God!) settled to your satisfaction, you will then return home and follow my advice implicitly, as that of your physician?'

'Yes; I promise; and now let us be off, for we have no time to lose.'

With a heavy heart I accompanied my friend. We started about four o'clock—Legrand, Jupiter, the dog, and myself. Jupiter had with him the scythe and spades—the whole of which he insisted upon carrying—more through fear, it seemed to me, of trusting either of the implements within reach of his master, than from any excess of industry or complaisance. His demeanour was dogged in the extreme, and 'dat deuced bug' were the sole words which escaped his lips during the journey. For my own part, I had charge of a couple of dark lanterns, while Legrand contented himself with the *scarabæus*, which he carried attached to the



end of a bit of whip-cord; twirling it to and fro, with the air of a conjuror, as he went. When I observed this last, plain evidence of my friend's aberration of mind, I could scarcely refrain from tears. I thought it best, however, to humour his fancy, at least for the present, or until I could adopt some more energetic measures with a chance of success. In the meantime I endeavoured, but all in vain, to sound him in regard to the object of the expedition. Having succeeded in inducing me to accompany him, he seemed unwilling to hold conversation upon any topic of minor importance, and to all my questions vouchsafed no other reply than 'we shall see!'

We crossed the creek at the head of the island by means of a skiff, and, ascending the high grounds on the shore of the mainland, proceeded in a north-westerly direction, through a tract of country excessively wild and desolate, where no trace of a human footstep was to be seen. Legrand led the way with decision; pausing only for an instant, here and there, to consult what appeared to be certain landmarks of his own contrivance upon a former occasion.

In this manner we journeyed for about two hours, and the sun was just setting when we entered a region infinitely more dreary than any yet seen. It was a species of table-land, near the summit of an almost inaccessible hill, densely wooded from base to pinnacle, and interspersed with huge crags that appeared to lie loosely upon the soil, and in many cases were prevented from precipitating themselves into the valleys below, merely by the support of the trees against which they reclined. Deep ravines, in various directions, gave an air of still sterner solemnity to the scene.

The natural platform to which we had clambered was thickly overgrown with brambles, through which we soon discovered that it would have been impossible to force our way but for the scythe; and Jupiter, by direction of his master, proceeded to clear for us a path to the foot of an enormously tall tulip-tree, which stood, with some eight or ten oaks, upon the level, and far surpassed them all, and all other trees which I had then ever seen, in the beauty of its foliage and form, in the wide spread of its branches, and in the general majesty of its appearance. When we reached this tree, Legrand turned to Jupiter, and asked him if he

thought he could climb it. The old man seemed a little staggered by the question, and for some moments made no reply. At length he approached the huge trunk, walked slowly around it, and examined it with minute attention. When he had completed his scrutiny, he merely said—

‘Yes, massa, Jup climb any tree he ebber see in he life.’

‘Then up with you as soon as possible, for it will soon be too dark to see what we are about.’

‘How far mus go up, massa?’ inquired Jupiter.

‘Get up the main trunk first, and then I will tell you which way to go—and here—stop! take this beetle with you.’

‘De bug, Massa Will!—de goole bug!’ cried the negro, drawing back in dismay—‘what for mus tote de bug way up de tree?’

‘If you are afraid, Jup, a great big negro like you, to take hold of a harmless little dead beetle, why you can carry it up by this string—but, if you do not take it up with you in some way, I shall be under the necessity of breaking your head with this shovel.’

‘What de matter now, massa?’ said Jup, evidently shamed into compliance; ‘always want for to raise fuss wid old nigger. Was only funnin any how. *Me* feered de bug! what I keer for de bug?’ Here he took cautiously hold of the extreme end of the string, and, maintaining the insect as far from his person as circumstances would permit, prepared to ascend the tree.

In youth, the tulip-tree, or *Liriodendron Tulipiferum*, the most magnificent of American foresters, has a trunk peculiarly smooth, and often rises to a great height without lateral branches; but, in its riper age, the bark becomes gnarled and uneven, while many short limbs make their appearance on the stem. Thus the difficulty of ascension, in the present case, lay more in semblance than in reality. Embracing the huge cylinder, as closely as possible, with his arms and knees, seizing with his hands some projections, and resting his naked toes upon others, Jupiter, after one or two narrow escapes from falling, at length wriggled himself into the first great fork, and seemed to consider the whole business as virtually accomplished. The risk of the achievement was, in fact, now over, although the climber was some sixty or seventy feet from the ground.

'Which way mus go now, Massa Will?' he asked.

'Keep up the largest branch—the one on this side,' said Legrand. The negro obeyed him promptly, and apparently with but little trouble; ascending higher and higher, until no glimpse of his squat figure could be obtained through the dense foliage which enveloped it. Presently his voice was heard in a sort of halloo:

'How much fudder is got for go?'

'How high up are you?' asked Legrand.

'Ebber so fur,' replied the negro; 'can see de sky fru de top of de tree.'

'Never mind the sky, but attend to what I say. Look down the trunk and count the limbs below you on this side. How many limbs have you passed?'

'One, two, tree, four, fibe—I done pass fibe big limb, massa, pon dis side.'

'Then go one limb higher.'

In a few minutes the voice was heard again, announcing that the seventh limb was attained.

'Now, Jup,' cried Legrand, evidently much excited, 'I want you to work your way out upon that limb as far as you can. If you see anything strange, let me know.'

By this time what little doubt I might have entertained of my poor friend's insanity was put finally at rest. I had no alternative but to conclude him stricken with lunacy, and I became seriously anxious about getting him home. While I was pondering upon what was best to be done, Jupiter's voice was again heard.

'Mos feerd fur to ventur pon dis limb berry far—'tis dead limb putty much all de way.'

'Did you say it was a *dead* limb, Jupiter?' cried Legrand in a quavering voice.

'Yes, massa, him dead as de door-nail—done up for sartain—done departed dis here life.'

'What in the name of heaven shall I do?' asked Legrand, seemingly in the greatest distress.

'Do!' said I, glad of an opportunity to interpose a word, 'why, come home and go to bed. Come now! that's a fine fellow. It's getting late, and besides, you remember your promise.'

'Jupiter,' cried he, without heeding me in the least, 'do you hear me?'

'Yes, Massa Will, hear you ebber so plain.'

'Try the wood well, then, with your knife, and see if you think it *very* rotten.'

'Him rotten, massa, sure nuff,' replied the negro in a few moments, 'but not so berry rotten as mought be. Mought ventur out leetle way pon de limb by myself, dat's true.'

'By yourself!—what do you mean?'

'Why, I mean de bug. 'Tis *berry* hebby bug. Spose I drop him down fuss, and den de limb won't break wid just de weight ob one nigger.'

'You infernal scoundrel!' cried Legrand, apparently much relieved, 'what do you mean by telling me such nonsense as that? As sure as you drop that beetle I'll break your neck. Look here, Jupiter, do you hear me?'

'Yes, massa, needn't hollo at poor nigger dat style.'

'Well! now listen!—if you will venture out on the limb as far as you think safe, and not let go the beetle, I'll make you a present of a silver dollar as soon as you get down.'

'I'm gwine, Massa Will—deed I is,'—replied the negro, very promptly—'mos out to the eend now.'

'*Out to the end!*' here fairly screamed Legrand, 'do you say you are out to the end of that limb?'

'Soon be to de eend, massa—o-o-o-o-oh! Lor-gol-a-marey! what is dis here pon de tree?'

'Well!' cried Legrand, highly delighted, 'what is it?'

'Why, taint nuffin but a skull—somebody bin lef him head up de tree, and de crows done gobble ebbery bit ob de meat off.'

'A skull, you say!—very well!—how is it fastened to the limb?—what holds it on?'

'Sure nuff, massa; mus look. Why, dis berry curous sarcumstance, pon my word—dare's a great big nail in de skull, what fastens ob it on to de tree.'

'Well now, Jupiter, do exactly as I tell you—do you hear?'

'Yes, massa.'

'Pay attention, then!—find the left eye of the skull.'

'Hum! hoo! dat's good! why, dare aint no eye lef at all.'

'Curse your stupidity! do you know your right hand from your left?'

'Yes, I nose dat—nose all bout dat—tis my lef hand what I chops de wood wid.'

'To be sure! you are left-handed; and your left eye is on the same side as your left hand. Now, I suppose, you can find the left eye of the skull, or the place where the left eye has been. Have you found it?'

Here was a long pause. At length the negro asked—

'Is de lef eye of de skull pon de same side as de lef hand of de skull, too?—cause de skull aint got not a bit ob a hand at all—nebber mind! I got de lef eye now—here de lef eye! what mus do wid it?'

'Let the beetle drop through it, as far as the string will reach—but be careful and not let go your hold of the string.'

'All dat done, Massa Will; mighty easy ting for to put de bug fru de hole—look out for him dare below!'

During this colloquy no portion of Jupiter's person could be seen; but the beetle, which he had suffered to descend, was now visible at the end of the string, and glistened like a globe of burnished gold, in the last rays of the setting sun, some of which still faintly illumined the eminence upon which we stood. The *scarabæus* hung quite clear of any branches, and, if allowed to fall, would have fallen at our feet. Legrand immediately took the scythe, and cleared with it a circular space, three or four yards in diameter, just beneath the insect, and, having accomplished this, ordered Jupiter to let go the string and come down from the tree.

Driving a peg, with great nicety, into the ground, at the precise spot where the beetle fell, my friend now produced from his pocket a tape-measure. Fastening one end of this at that point of the trunk of the tree which was nearest the peg, he unrolled it till it reached the peg, and thence farther unrolled it, in the direction already established by the two points of the tree and the peg, for the distance of fifty feet—Jupiter clearing away the brambles with the scythe. At the spot thus attained a second peg was driven, and about this, as a centre, a rude circle, about four feet in diameter, described. Taking now a spade himself, and giving one to

Jupiter and one to me, Legrand begged us to set about digging as quickly as possible.

To speak the truth, I had no especial relish for such amusement at any time, and, at that particular moment, would most willingly have declined it; for the night was coming on, and I felt much fatigued with the exercise already taken; but I saw no mode of escape, and was fearful of disturbing my poor friend's equanimity by a refusal. Could I have depended, indeed, upon Jupiter's aid, I would have had no hesitation in attempting to get the lunatic home by force; but I was too well assured of the old negro's disposition, to hope that he would assist me, under any circumstances, in a personal contest with his master. I made no doubt that the latter had been infected with some of the innumerable Southern superstitions about money buried, and that his fantasy had received confirmation by the finding of the *scarabæus*, or, perhaps, by Jupiter's obstinacy in maintaining it to be 'a bug of real gold'. A mind disposed to lunacy would readily be led away by such suggestions—especially if chiming in with favourite preconceived ideas—and then I called to mind the poor fellow's speech about the beetle's being 'the index of his fortune'. Upon the whole, I was sadly vexed and puzzled, but, at length, I concluded to make a virtue of necessity—to dig with a good will, and thus the sooner to convince the visionary, by ocular demonstration, of the fallacy of the opinions he entertained.

The lanterns having been lit, we all fell to work with a zeal worthy a more rational cause; and, as the glare fell upon our persons and implements, I could not help thinking how picturesque a group we composed, and how strange and suspicious our labours must have appeared to any interloper who, by chance, might have stumbled upon our whereabouts.

We dug very steadily for two hours. Little was said; and our chief embarrassment lay in the yelpings of the dog, who took exceeding interest in our proceedings. He at length became so obstreperous that we grew fearful of his giving the alarm to some stragglers in the vicinity—or, rather, this was the apprehension of Legrand—for myself, I should have rejoiced at any interruption which might have enabled me to get the wanderer home. The noise was,

at length, very effectually silenced by Jupiter, who, getting out of the hole with a dogged air of deliberation, tied the brute's mouth up with one of his suspenders, and then returned, with a grave chuckle, to his task.

When the time mentioned had expired, we had reached a depth of five feet, and yet no signs of any treasure became manifest. A general pause ensued, and I began to hope that the farce was at an end. Legrand, however, although evidently much disconcerted, wiped his brow thoughtfully and recommenced. We had excavated the entire circle of four feet diameter, and now we slightly enlarged the limit, and went to the further depth of two feet. Still nothing appeared. The gold-seeker, whom I sincerely pitied, at length clambered from the pit, with the bitterest disappointment imprinted upon every feature, and proceeded, slowly and reluctantly, to put on his coat, which he had thrown off at the beginning of his labour. In the meantime I made no remark. Jupiter, at a signal from his master, began to gather up his tools. This done, and the dog having been unmuzzled, we turned in profound silence towards home.

We had taken, perhaps, a dozen steps in this direction, when, with a loud oath, Legrand strode up to Jupiter, and seized him by the collar. The astonished negro opened his eyes and mouth to the fullest extent; let fall the spades, and fell upon his knees.

'You scoundrel!' said Legrand, hissing out the syllables from between his clenched teeth—'you infernal black villain!—speak, I tell you!—answer me this instant, without prevarication!—which—which is your left eye?'

'Oh, my golly, Massa Will! aint dis here my lef eye for sartain?' roared the terrified Jupiter, placing his hand upon his *right* organ of vision, and holding it there with a desperate pertinacity, as if in immediate dread of his master's attempt at a gouge.

'I thought so!—I knew it! hurrah!' vociferated Legrand, letting the negro go, and executing a series of curvets and caracoles, much to the astonishment of his valet, who, arising from his knees, looked mutely from his master to myself, and then from myself to his master.

'Come! we must go back,' said the latter; 'the game's not up yet;' and he again led the way to the tulip-tree.

'Jupiter,' said he, when we reached its foot, 'come here! Was the skull nailed to the limb with the face outwards, or with the face to the limb?'

'De face was out, massa, so dat de crows could get at de eyes good, widout any trouble.'

'Well, then, was it this eye or that through which you dropped the beetle?'—here Legrand touched each of Jupiter's eyes.

'Twas dis eye, massa—de lef eye—jis as you tell me,' and here it was his right eye that the negro indicated.

'That will do—we must try it again.'

Here my friend, about whose madness I now saw, or fancied that I saw, certain indications of method, removed the peg which marked the spot where the beetle fell, to a spot about three inches to the westward of its former position. Taking, now, the tape-measure from the nearest point of the trunk to the peg, as before, and continuing the extension in a straight line to the distance of fifty feet, a spot was indicated, removed, by several yards, from the point at which we had been digging.

Around the new position a circle, somewhat larger than in the former instance, was now described, and we again set to work with the spades. I was dreadfully weary, but, scarcely understanding what had occasioned the change in my thoughts, I felt no longer any great aversion from the labour imposed. I had become most unaccountably interested—nay, even excited. Perhaps there was something, amid all the extravagant demeanour of Legrand—some air of forethought, or of deliberation, which impressed me. I dug eagerly, and now and then caught myself actually looking, with something that very much resembled expectation, for the fancied treasure, the vision of which had demented my unfortunate companion. At a period when such vagaries of thought most fully possessed me, and when we had been at work perhaps an hour and a half, we were again interrupted by the violent howlings of the dog. His uneasiness in the first instance, had been, evidently, but the result of playfulness or caprice, but he now assumed a bitter and serious tone. Upon Jupiter's again attempting to muzzle him, he made furious resistance, and, leaping into the hole, tore up the mould frantically with his claws. In a few seconds he



had uncovered a mass of human bones, forming two complete skeletons, intermingled with several buttons of metal, and what appeared to be the dust of decayed woollen. One or two strokes of a spade upturned the blade of a large Spanish knife, and, as we dug farther, three or four loose pieces of gold and silver coin came to light.

At sight of these the joy of Jupiter could scarcely be restrained, but the countenance of his master wore an air of extreme disappointment. He urged us, however, to continue our exertions, and the words were hardly uttered when I stumbled and fell forward, having caught the toe of my boot in a large ring of iron that lay half-buried in the loose earth.

We now worked in earnest, and never did I pass ten minutes of more intense excitement. During this interval we had fairly unearthed an oblong chest of wood, which, from its perfect preservation and wonderful hardness, had plainly been subjected to some mineralizing process—perhaps that of the bi-chloride of mercury. This box was three feet and a half long, three feet broad, and two and a half feet deep. It was firmly secured by bands of wrought iron, riveted, and forming a kind of open trellis-work over the whole. On each side of the chest, near the top, were three rings of iron—six in all—by means of which a firm hold could be obtained by six persons. Our utmost united endeavours served only to disturb the coffer very slightly in its bed. We at once saw the impossibility of removing so great a weight. Luckily, the sole fastenings of the lid consisted of two sliding bolts. These we drew back—trembling and panting with anxiety. In an instant, a treasure of incalculable value lay gleaming before us. As the rays of the lanterns fell within the pit, there flashed upwards a glow and a glare, from a confused heap of gold and of jewels, that absolutely dazzled our eyes.

I shall not pretend to describe the feelings with which I gazed. Amazement was, of course, predominant. Legrand appeared exhausted with excitement, and spoke very few words. Jupiter's countenance wore, for some minutes, as deadly a pallor as it is possible, in the nature of things, for any negro's visage to assume. He seemed stupefied—thunder-stricken. Presently he fell upon his knees in the pit,

and, burying his naked arms up to the elbows in gold, let them there remain, as if enjoying the luxury of a bath. At length, with a deep sigh, he exclaimed as if in a soliloquy—

‘And dis all come ob de goole bug! de putty goole bug! de poor little goole bug, what I boosed in dat sabage kind ob style! Aint you shamed ob yourself, nigger?—answer me dat!’

It became necessary, at last, that I should arouse both master and valet to the expediency of removing the treasure. It was growing late, and it behoved us to make exertion, that we might get everything housed before daylight. It was difficult to say what should be done, and much time was spent in deliberation—so confused were the ideas of all. We, finally, lightened the box by removing two-thirds of its contents, when we were enabled, with some trouble, to raise it from the hole. The articles taken out were deposited among the brambles, and the dog left to guard them, with strict orders from Jupiter, neither, upon any pretence, to stir from the spot, nor to open his mouth until our return. We then hurriedly made for home with the chest; reaching the hut in safety, but after excessive toil, at one o’clock in the morning. Worn out as we were, it was not in human nature to do more immediately. We rested until two, and had supper; starting for the hills immediately afterwards, armed with three stout sacks, which, by good luck, were upon the premises. A little before four we arrived at the pit, divided the remainder of the booty, as equally as might be, among us, and, leaving the holes unfilled, again set out for the hut, at which, for the second time, we deposited our golden burdens, just as the first faint streaks of the dawn gleamed from over the tree-tops in the east.

We were now thoroughly broken down; but the intense excitement of the time denied us repose. After an unquiet slumber of some three or four hours’ duration, we arose, as as if by preconcert, to make examination of our treasure.

The chest had been full to the brim, and we spent the whole day, and the greater part of the next night, in a scrutiny of its contents. There had been nothing like order or arrangement. Everything had been heaped in promiscuously. Having assorted all with care, we found ourselves possessed of even vaster wealth than we had at first

supposed. In coin there was rather more than four hundred and fifty thousand dollars—estimating the value of the pieces, as accurately as we could, by the tables of the period. There was not a particle of silver. All was gold of antique date and of great variety—French, Spanish, and German money, with a few English guineas, and some counters, of which we had never seen specimens before. There were several very large and heavy coins, so worn that we could make nothing of their inscriptions. There was no American money. The value of the jewels we found more difficulty in estimating. There were diamonds—some of them exceedingly large and fine—a hundred and ten in all, and not one of them small; eighteen rubies of remarkable brilliancy; three hundred and ten emeralds, all very beautiful; and twenty-one sapphires, with an opal. These stones had all been broken from their settings and thrown loose in the chest. The settings themselves, which we picked out from among the other gold, appeared to have been beaten up with hammers, as if to prevent identification. Besides all this, there was a vast quantity of solid gold ornaments—nearly two hundred massive finger- and ear-rings; rich chains—thirty of these, if I remember; eighty-three very large and heavy crucifixes; five gold censers of great value; a prodigious golden punch-bowl, ornamented with richly-chased vine-leaves and Bacchanalian figures; with two sword handles exquisitely embossed, and many other smaller articles which I cannot recollect. The weight of these valuables exceeded three hundred and fifty pounds avoirdupois; and in this estimate I have not included one hundred and ninety-seven superb gold watches; three of the number being worth each five hundred dollars, if one. Many of them were very old, and as time-keepers valueless; the works having suffered, more or less, from corrosion—but all were richly jewelled and in cases of great worth. We estimated the entire contents of the chest, that night, at a million and a half of dollars; and upon the subsequent disposal of the trinkets and jewels (a few being retained for our own use), it was found that we had greatly undervalued the treasure.

When, at length, we had concluded our examination, and the intense excitement of the time had, in some measure, subsided, Legrand, who saw that I was dying with im-

patience for a solution of this most extraordinary riddle, entered into a full detail of all the circumstances connected with it.

'You remember,' said he, 'the night when I handed you the rough sketch I had made of the *scarabaeus*. You recollect also, that I became quite vexed at you for insisting that my drawing resembled a death's-head. When you first made this assertion I thought you were jesting; but afterwards I called to mind the peculiar spots on the back of the insect, and admitted to myself that your remark had some little foundation in fact. Still, the sneer at my graphic powers irritated me—for I am considered a good artist—and, therefore, when you handed me the scrap of parchment, I was about to crumple it up and throw it angrily into the fire.'

'The scrap of paper, you mean,' said I.

'No; it had much of the appearance of paper, and at first I supposed it to be such, but when I came to draw upon it, I discovered it, at once, to be a piece of very thin parchment. It was quite dirty, you remember. Well, as I was in the very act of crumpling it up, my glance fell upon the sketch at which you had been looking, and you may imagine my astonishment when I perceived in fact, the figure of a death's-head just where, it seemed to me, I had made the drawing of the beetle. For a moment I was too much amazed to think with accuracy. I knew that my design was very different in detail from this—although there was a certain similarity in general outline. Presently I took a candle, and seating myself at the other end of the room, proceeded to scrutinize the parchment more closely. Upon turning it over, I saw my own sketch upon the reverse, just as I had made it. My first idea, now, was mere surprise at the really remarkable similarity of outline—at the singular coincidence involved in the fact, that unknown to me, there should have been a skull upon the other side of the parchment, immediately beneath my figure of the *scarabaeus*, and that this skull, not only in outline, but in size, should so closely resemble my drawing. I say the singularity of this coincidence absolutely stupefied me for a time. This is the usual effect of such coincidences. The mind struggles to establish a connexion—a sequence of cause and effect—and,

being unable to do so, suffers a species of temporary paralysis. But, when I recovered from this stupor, there dawned upon me gradually a conviction which startled me even far more than the coincidence. I began distinctly, positively, to remember that there had been *no* drawing upon the parchment when I made my sketch of the *scarabaeus*. I became perfectly certain of this; for I recollected turning up first one side and then the other, in search of the cleanest spot. Had the skull been then there, of course I could not have failed to notice it. Here was indeed a mystery which I felt it impossible to explain; but even at that early moment, there seemed to glimmer, faintly, within the most remote and secret chambers of my intellect, a glow-worm-like conception of that truth which last night's adventure brought to so magnificent a demonstration. I arose at once, and putting the parchment securely away, dismissed all further reflection until I should be alone.

'When you had gone, and when Jupiter was fast asleep, I betook myself to a more methodical investigation of the affair. In the first place I considered the manner in which the parchment had come into my possession. The spot where we discovered the *scarabaeus* was on the coast of the mainland, about a mile eastward of the island, and but a short distance above high-water mark. Upon my taking hold of it, it gave me a sharp bite, which caused me to let it drop. Jupiter, with his accustomed caution, before seizing the insect, which had flown towards him, looked about him for a leaf, or something of that nature, by which to take hold of it. It was at this moment that his eyes, and mine also, fell upon the scrap of parchment, which I then supposed to be paper. It was lying half buried in the sand, a corner sticking up. Near the spot where we found it, I observed the remnants of the hull of what appeared to have been a ship's long-boat. The wreck seemed to have been there for a very great while; for the resemblance to boat timbers could scarcely be traced.

'Well, Jupiter picked up the parchment, wrapped the beetle in it, and gave it to me. Soon afterwards we turned to go home, and on the way met Lieutenant G——. I showed him the insect, and he begged me to let him take it to the fort. Upon my consenting, he thrust it forthwith into his

waistcoat pocket, without the parchment in which it had been wrapped, and which I had continued to hold in my hand during his inspection. Perhaps he dreaded my changing my mind, and thought it best to make sure of the prize at once—you know how enthusiastic he is on all subjects connected with Natural History. At the same time, without being conscious of it, I must have deposited the parchment in my own pocket.

‘You remember that when I went to the table, for the purpose of making a sketch of the beetle, I found no paper where it was usually kept. I looked in the drawer, and found none there. I searched my pockets, hoping to find an old letter, when my hand fell upon the parchment. I thus detail the precise mode in which it came into my possession; for the circumstances impressed me with peculiar force.

‘No doubt you will think me fanciful—but I had already established a kind of *connexion*. I had put together two links of a great chain. There was a boat lying upon a sea-coast, and not far from the boat was a parchment—*not a paper*—with a skull depicted upon it. You will, of course, ask “where is the connexion?” I reply that the skull, or death’s-head, is the well-known emblem of the pirate. The flag of the death’s-head is hoisted in all engagements.

‘I have said that the scrap was parchment, and not paper. Parchment is durable—almost imperishable. Matters of little moment are rarely consigned to parchment; since, for the mere ordinary purposes of drawing or writing, it is not nearly so well adapted as paper. This reflection suggested some meaning—some relevancy—in the death’s-head. I did not fail to observe, also, the *form* of the parchment. Although one of its corners had been, by some accident, destroyed, it could be seen that the original form was oblong. It was just such a slip, indeed, as might have been chosen for a memorandum—for a record of something to be long remembered and carefully preserved.’

‘But,’ I interposed, ‘you say that the skull was *not* upon the parchment when you made the drawing of the beetle. How then do you trace any connexion between the boat and the skull—since this latter, according to your own admission, must have been designed (God only knows how

or by whom) at some period subsequent to your sketching the *scarabaeus*?’

‘Ah, hereupon turns the whole mystery; although the secret, at this point, I had comparatively little difficulty in solving. My steps were sure, and could afford but a single result. I reasoned, for example, thus: When I drew the *scarabaeus*, there was no skull apparent upon the parchment. When I had completed the drawing I gave it to you, and observed you narrowly until you returned it. *You*, therefore, did not design the skull, and no one else was present to do it. Then it was not done by human agency. And nevertheless it was done.

‘At this stage of my reflections I endeavoured to remember, and *did* remember, with entire distinctness, every incident which occurred about the period in question. The weather was chilly (oh, rare and happy accident!), and a fire was blazing upon the hearth. I was heated with exercise and sat near the table. You, however, had drawn a chair close to the chimney. Just as I placed the parchment in your hand, and as you were in the act of inspecting it, Wolf, the Newfoundland, entered, and leaped upon your shoulders. With your left hand you caressed him and kept him off, while your right, holding the parchment, was permitted to fall listlessly between your knees, and in close proximity to the fire. At one moment I thought the blaze had caught it, and was about to caution you, but before I could speak you had withdrawn it, and were engaged in its examination. When I considered all these particulars, I doubted not for a moment that *heat* had been the agent in bringing to light, upon the parchment, the skull which I saw designed upon it. You are well aware that chemical preparations exist, and have existed time out of mind, by means of which it is possible to write upon either paper or vellum, so that the characters shall become visible only when subjected to the action of fire. Zaffre, digested in *aqua regia*, and diluted with four times its weight of water, is sometimes employed; a green tint results. The regulus of cobalt, dissolved in spirit of nitre, gives a red. These colours disappear at longer or shorter intervals after the material written upon cools, but again become apparent upon the reapplication of heat.

'I now scrutinized the death's-head with care. Its outer edges—the edges of the drawing nearest the edge of the vellum—were far more *distinct* than the others. It was clear that the action of the caloric had been imperfect or unequal. I immediately kindled a fire, and subjected every portion of the parchment to a glowing heat. At first, the only effect was the strengthening of the faint lines in the skull; but, upon persevering in the experiment, there became visible, at the corner of the slip, diagonally opposite to the spot in which the death's-head was delineated, the figure of what I at first supposed to be a goat. A closer scrutiny, however, satisfied me that it was intended for a kid.'

'Ha! ha!' said I, 'to be sure I have no right to laugh at you—a million and a half of money is too serious a matter for mirth—but you are not about to establish a third link in your chain—you will not find any special connexion between your pirates and a goat—pirates, you know, have nothing to do with goats; they appertain to the farming interest.'

'But I have just said that the figure was *not* that of a goat.'

'Well, a kid, then—pretty much the same thing.'

'Pretty much, but not altogether,' said Legrand. 'You may have heard of one *Captain Kidd*. I at once looked upon the figure of the animal as a kind of punning or hieroglyphical signature. I say signature; because its position upon the vellum suggested this idea. The death's-head at the corner diagonally opposite, had, in the same manner, the air of a stamp, or seal. But I was sorely put out by the absence of all else—of the body to my imagined instrument—of the text for my context.'

'I presume you expected to find a letter between the stamp and the signature.'

'Something of that kind. The fact is, I felt irresistibly impressed with a presentiment of some vast good fortune impending. I can scarcely say why. Perhaps, after all, it was rather a desire than an actual belief; but do you know that Jupiter's silly words, about the bug being of solid gold, had a remarkable effect upon my fancy? And then the series of accidents and coincidences—these were so *very* extraordinary. Do you observe how mere an accident



it was that these events should have occurred upon the *sole* day of all the year in which it has been, or may be, sufficiently cool for fire, and that without the fire, or without the intervention of the dog at the precise moment in which he appeared, I should never have become aware of the death's-head, and so never the possessor of the treasure?'

'But proceed—I am all impatience.'

'Well; you have heard, of course, the many stories current—the thousand vague rumours afloat, about money buried, somewhere upon the Atlantic coast, by Kidd and his associates. These rumours must have had some foundation in fact. And that the rumours have existed so long and so continuous, could have resulted, it appeared to me, only from the circumstance of the buried treasure still *remaining* entombed. Had Kidd concealed his plunder for a time, and afterwards reclaimed it, the rumours would scarcely have reached us in their present unvarying form. You will observe that the stories told are all about money-seekers, not about money-finders. Had the pirate recovered his money, there the affair would have dropped. It seemed to me that some accident—say the loss of a memorandum indicating its locality—had deprived him of the means of recovering it, and that this accident had become known to his followers, who otherwise might never have heard that treasure had been concealed at all, and who, busying themselves in vain, because unguided attempts, to regain it, had given first birth, and then universal currency, to the reports which are now so common. Have you ever heard of any important treasure being unearthed along the coast?'

'Never.'

'But that Kidd's accumulations were immense, is well known. I took it for granted, therefore, that the earth still held them; and you will scarcely be surprised when I tell you that I felt a hope, nearly amounting to certainty, that the parchment so strangely found, involved a lost record of the place of deposit.'

'But how did you proceed?'

'I held the vellum again to the fire, after increasing the heat; but nothing appeared. I now thought it possible that the coating of dirt might have something to do with the failure; so I carefully rinsed the parchment by pouring

warm water over it, and, having done this, I placed it in a tin pan, with the skull downwards, and put the pan upon a furnace of lighted charcoal. In a few minutes, the pan having become thoroughly heated, I removed the slip, and, to my inexpressible joy, found it spotted in several places, with what appeared to be figures arranged in lines. Again I placed it in the pan, and suffered it to remain another minute. Upon taking it off, the whole was just as you see it now.'

Here Legrand, having reheated the parchment, submitted it to my inspection. The following characters were rudely traced, in a red tint, between the death's-head and the goat:—

53;|+305)6+;4826)4+.)4+);806\*;48+8(60)85;1+(:+\*8+83(88)  
5\*+;46(88\*96\*?;8)\*|(;485);5\*+2:.\*+;4956\*2(5\*—4)8(8\*+40692  
85);6+8)4+|;1(|9;48081;8:8|1;48+85;4)485+528806\*81(|9;48;  
(88;4(|?34;48)4|;161;188;|?;

'But,' said I, returning him the slip, 'I am as much in the dark as ever. Were all the jewels of Golconda awaiting me upon my solution of this enigma, I am quite sure that I should be unable to earn them.'

'And yet,' said Legrand, 'the solution is by no means so difficult as you might be led to imagine from the first hasty inspection of the characters. These characters, as any one might readily guess, form a cipher—that is to say, they convey a meaning; but then, from what is known of Kidd, I could not suppose him capable of constructing any of the more abstruse cryptographs. I made up my mind, at once, that this was of a simple species—such, however, as would appear, to the crude intellect of the sailor, absolutely insoluble without the key.'

'And you really solved it?'

'Readily; I have solved others of an abstruseness ten thousand times greater. Circumstances, and a certain bias of mind, have led me to take interest in such riddles, and it may well be doubted whether human ingenuity can construct an enigma of the kind which human ingenuity may not, by proper application, resolve. In fact, having once established connected and legible characters, I scarcely gave

a thought to the mere difficulty of developing their import.

'In the present case—indeed, in all cases of secret writing—the first question regards the *language* of the cipher; for the principles of solution, so far, especially, as the more simple ciphers are concerned, depend upon, and are varied by, the genius of the particular idiom. In general there is no alternative but experiment (directed by probabilities) of every tongue known to him who attempts the solution, until the true one be attained. But, with the cipher now before us, all difficulty was removed by the signature. The pun upon the word "Kidd" is appreciable in no other language than the English. But for this consideration I should have begun my attempts with the Spanish and French, as the tongues in which a secret of this kind would most naturally have been written by a pirate of the Spanish Main. As it was, I assumed the cryptograph to be English.

'You observe there are no divisions between the words. Had there been divisions, the task would have been comparatively easy. In such case I should have commenced with a collation and analysis of the shorter words, and had a word of a single letter occurred, as is most likely (*a* or *I* for example) I should have considered the solution as assured. But, there being no division, my first step was to ascertain the predominant letters, as well as the least frequent. Counting all, I constructed a table, thus:—

'Of the character 8 there are 33.

|     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| ;   | " | 26. |
| 4   | " | 19. |
| l ) | " | 16. |
| ~   | " | 13. |
| 5   | " | 12. |
| 6   | " | 11. |
| (   | " | 10. |
| † 1 | " | 8.  |
| 0   | " | 6.  |
| 9 2 | " | 5.  |
| : 3 | " | 4.  |
| ?   | " | 3.  |
| ¶   | " | 2.  |
| - . | " | 1.  |

'Now, in English, the letter which most frequently occurs is *e*. Afterwards, the succession runs thus: *a o i d h n r s t u y c f g l m w b k p q x z*. *E* predominates so remarkably that an individual sentence of any length is rarely seen, in which it is not the prevailing character.

'Here, then, we have, in the very beginning, the groundwork for something more than a mere guess. The general use which may be made of the table is obvious—but in this particular cipher we shall only very partially require its aid. As our predominant character is 8, we will commence by assuming it as the *e* of the natural alphabet. To verify the supposition, let us observe if the 8 be seen often in couples—for *e* is doubled with great frequency in English—in such words for example, as "meet," "fleet," "speed," "seen," "been," "agree," &c. In the present instance we see it doubled no less than five times, although the cryptograph is brief.

'Let us assume 8, then, as *e*. Now, of all words in the language "the" is the most usual; let us see, therefore, whether there are not repetitions of any three characters, in the same order of collocation, the last of them being 8. If we discover repetitions of such letters, so arranged, they will most probably represent the word "the". Upon inspection, we find no less than seven such arrangements, the characters being ;48. We may therefore assume that ; represents *t*, 4 represents *h*, and 8 represents *e*—the last being now well confirmed. Thus a great step has been taken.

'But, having established a single word, we are enabled to establish a vastly important point; that is to say, several commencements and terminations of other words. Let us refer, for example, to the last instance but one, in which the combination ;48 occurs—not far from the end of the cipher. We know that the ; immediately ensuing is the commencement of a word, and of the six characters succeeding this 'the,' we are cognizant of no less than five. Let us set these characters down, thus, by the letters we know them to represent, leaving a space for the unknown—

t eeth.

'Here we are enabled, at once, to discard the "*th*", as forming no portion of the word commencing with the first *t*; since, by experiment of the entire alphabet for a letter

adapted to the vacancy, we perceive that no word can be formed of which this *th* can be a part. We are thus narrowed into

t ee,

and, going through the alphabet, if necessary, as before, we arrive at the word "tree", as the sole possible reading. We thus gain another letter, *r*, represented by (, with the words "the tree" in juxtaposition.

'Looking beyond these words, for a short distance, we again see the combination ;48, and employ it by way of *termination* to what immediately precedes. We have thus this arrangement—

the tree ;4(†?34 the,

or, substituting the natural letters, where known, it reads thus—

the tree thr†?3h the.

'Now if, in place of the unknown characters, we leave blank spaces, or substitute dots, we read thus—

the tree thr...h the,

when the word "*through*" makes itself evident at once. But this discovery gives us three new letters *o*, *u*, and *g*, represented by ‡ ? and 3.

'Looking now, narrowly, through the cipher for combinations of known characters, we find, not very far from the beginning, this arrangement—

83(88, or egree,

which, plainly, is the conclusion of the word "degree", and gives us another letter, *d*, represented by †.

'Four letters beyond the word "degree", we perceive the combination

;46(;88<sup>k</sup>.

'Translating the known characters, and representing the unknown by dots, as before, we read thus—

th.rtee.

an arrangement immediately suggestive of the word "thirteen", and again furnishing us with two new characters, *i* and *n*, represented by 6 and \*.

'Referring, now, to the beginning of the cryptograph, we find the combination

53†††.

'Translating, as before, we obtain

. good,

which assures us that the first letter is *A*, and that the first two words are "A good".

'It is now time that we arrange our key, as far as discovered, in a tabular form, to avoid confusion. It will stand thus—

|   |              |   |
|---|--------------|---|
| 5 | represents a |   |
| † | "            | d |
| 8 | "            | e |
| 3 | "            | g |
| 4 | "            | h |
| 6 | "            | i |
| . | "            | n |
| : | "            | o |
| ( | "            | r |
| ; | "            | t |

'We have, therefore, no less than ten of the most important letters represented, and it will be unnecessary to proceed with the details of the solution. I have said enough to convince you that ciphers of this nature are readily soluble, and to give you some insight into the *rationale* of their development. But be assured that the specimen before us appertains to the very simplest species of cryptograph. It now only remains to give you the full translation of the characters upon the parchment, as unriddled. Here it is:

*"A good glass in the bishop's hostel in the devil's seat forty-one degrees and thirteen minutes north-east and by north main branch seventh limb east side shoot from the left eye of the death's-head a bee line from the tree through the shot fifty feet out."*

‘But,’ said I, ‘the enigma seems still in as bad a condition as ever. How is it possible to extort a meaning from all this jargon about “devil’s seats,” “death’s-heads,” and “bishop’s hostels”?’

‘I confess,’ replied Legrand, ‘that the matter still wears a serious aspect when regarded with a casual glance. My first endeavour was to divide the sentence into the natural division intended by the cryptographist.’

‘You mean to punctuate it?’

‘Something of that kind.’

‘But how was it possible to effect this?’

‘I reflected that it had been a *point* with the writer to run his words together without division, so as to increase the difficulty of solution. Now, a not over-acute man, in pursuing such an object, would be nearly certain to overdo the matter. When, in the course of his composition, he arrived at a break in his subject which would naturally require a pause, or a point, he would be exceedingly apt to run his characters, at this place, more than usually close together. If you will observe the MS., in the present instance, you will easily detect five such cases of unusual crowding. Acting upon this hint, I made the division thus:—

*“A good glass in the Bishop’s hostel in the Devil’s scat—  
forty-one degrees and thirteen minutes—north-east and by  
north—main branch seventh limb east side—shoot from the left  
eye of the death’s-head—a bee-line from the tree through the shot  
jifty feet out.”*

‘Even this division,’ said I, ‘leaves me still in the dark.’

‘It left me also in the dark,’ replied Legrand, ‘for a few days; during which I made diligent inquiry, in the neighbourhood of Sullivan’s Island, for any building which went by the name of the “Bishop’s Hotel”; for, of course, I dropped the obsolete word “hostel”. Gaining no information on the subject, I was on the point of extending my sphere of search, and proceeding in a more systematic manner, when, one morning, it entered into my head, quite suddenly, that this “Bishop’s Hostel” might have some

reference to an old family, of the name of Bessop, which, time out of mind, had held possession of an ancient manor-house, about four miles to the northward of the island. I accordingly went over to the plantation, and reinstituted my inquiries among the older negroes of the place. At length one of the most aged of the women said that she had heard of such a place as *Bessop's Castle*, and thought that she could guide me to it, but that it was not a castle, nor a tavern, but a high rock.

'I offered to pay her well for her trouble, and after some demur, she consented to accompany me to the spot. We found it without much difficulty, when, dismissing her, I proceeded to examine the place. The "castle" consisted of an irregular assemblage of cliffs and rocks—one of the latter being quite remarkable for its height as well as for its insulated and artificial appearance. I clambered to its apex, and then felt much at a loss as to what should be next done.

'While I was busied in reflection, my eyes fell upon a narrow ledge in the eastern face of the rock, perhaps a yard below the summit upon which I stood. This ledge projected about eighteen inches, and was not more than a foot wide, while a niche in the cliff just above it, gave it a rude resemblance to one of the hollow-backed chairs used by our ancestors. I made no doubt that here was the "devil's-seat" alluded to in the MS., and now I seemed to grasp the full secret of the riddle.

The "good glass," I knew, could have reference to nothing but a telescope; for the word "glass" is rarely employed in any other sense by seamen. Now here, I at once saw, was a telescope to be used, and a definite point of view, *admitting no variation*, from which to use it. Nor did I hesitate to believe that the phrases, "forty-one degrees and thirteen minutes", and "north-east and by north", were intended as directions for the levelling of the glass. Greatly excited by these discoveries, I hurried home, procured a telescope, and returned to the rock.

'I let myself down to the ledge, and found that it was impossible to retain a seat upon it except in one particular position. This fact confirmed my preconceived idea. I proceeded to use the glass. Of course, the "forty-one



degrees and thirteen minutes" could allude to nothing but elevation above the visible horizon, since the horizontal direction was clearly indicated by the words, "north-east and by north". This latter direction I at once established by means of a pocket-compass; then, pointing the glass as nearly at an angle of forty-one degrees of elevation as I could do it by guess, I moved it cautiously up or down, until my attention was arrested by a circular rift or opening in the foliage of a large tree that overtopped its fellows in the distance. In the centre of this rift I perceived a white spot, but could not, at first, distinguish what it was. Adjusting the focus of the telescope, I again looked, and now made it out to be a human skull.

'Upon this discovery I was so sanguine as to consider the enigma solved; for the phrase "main branch, seventh limb, east side", could refer only to the position of the skull upon the tree, while "shoot from the left eye of the death's-head" admitted, also, of but one interpretation, in regard to a search for buried treasure. I perceived that the design was to drop a bullet from the left eye of the skull, and that a bee-line, or, in other words, a straight line, drawn from the nearest point of the trunk through "the shot" (or the spot where the bullet fell), and thence extended to a distance of fifty feet, would indicate a definite point—and beneath this point I thought it at least *possible* that a deposit of value lay concealed.'

'All this,' I said, 'is exceedingly clear, and, although ingenious, still simple and explicit. When you left the Bishop's Hotel, what then?'

'Why, having carefully taken the bearings of the tree, I turned homewards. The instant that I left "the devil's seat", however, the circular rift vanished; nor could I get a glimpse of it afterwards, turn as I would. What seems to me the chief ingenuity in this whole business, is the fact (for repeated experiment has convinced me it is a fact) that the circular opening in question is visible from no other attainable point of view than that afforded by the narrow ledge upon the face of the rock.

'In this expedition to the "Bishop's Hotel" I had been attended by Jupiter, who had, no doubt, observed, for some weeks past, the abstraction of my demeanour, and took

especial care not to leave me alone. But, on the next day, getting up very early, I contrived to give him the slip, and went into the hills in search of the tree. After much toil I found it. When I came home at night my valet proposed to give me a flogging. With the rest of the adventure I believe you are as well acquainted as myself.'

'I suppose,' said I, 'you missed the spot, in the first attempt at digging, through Jupiter's stupidity in letting the bug fall through the right instead of through the left eye of the skull.'

'Precisely. This mistake made a difference of about two inches and a half in the "shot"—that is to say, in the position of the peg nearest the tree; and had the treasure been *beneath* the "shot", the error would have been of little moment; but the "shot", together with the nearest point of the tree, were merely two points for the establishment of a line of direction; of course the error, however trivial in the beginning, increased as we proceeded with the line, and by the time we had gone fifty feet, threw us quite off the scent. But for my deep-seated impressions that treasure was here somewhere actually buried, we might have had all our labour in vain.'

'But your grandiloquence, and your conduct in swinging the beetle—how excessively odd! I was sure you were mad. And why did you insist upon letting fall the bug, instead of a bullet from the skull?'

'Why, to be frank, I felt somewhat annoyed by your evident suspicious touching my sanity, and so resolved to punish you quietly, in my own way, by a little bit of sober mystification. For this reason I swung the beetle, and for this reason I let it fall from the tree. An observation of yours about its great weight suggested the latter idea.'

'Yes, I perceive; and now there is only one point which puzzles me. What are we to make of the skeletons found in the hole?'

'That is a question I am no more able to answer than yourself. There seems, however, only one plausible way of accounting for them—and yet it is dreadful to believe in such atrocity as my suggestion would imply. It is clear that Kidd—if Kidd indeed secreted this treasure, which I doubt not—it is clear that he must have had assistance

in the labour. But this labour concluded, he may have thought it expedient to remove all participants in his secret. Perhaps a couple of blows with a mattock were sufficient, while his coadjutors were busy in the pit; perhaps it required a dozen—who shall tell?’

*From Tales of Mystery and Imagination.*

# CHARLES DICKENS

1812-1870

## THE STORY OF THE GOBLINS WHO STOLE A SEXTON

IN an old abbey town, down in this part of the country, a long, long while ago—so long, that the story must be a true one, because our great-grandfathers implicitly believed it—there officiated as sexton and grave-digger in the churchyard, one Gabriel Grub. It by no means follows that because a man is a sexton, and constantly surrounded by the emblems of mortality, therefore he should be a morose and melancholy man; your undertakers are the merriest fellows in the world; and I once had the honour of being on intimate terms with a mute, who in private life, and off duty, was as comical and jocose a little fellow as ever chirped out a devil-may-care song, without a hitch in his memory, or drained off the contents of a good stiff glass without stopping for breath. But, notwithstanding these precedents to the contrary, Gabriel Grub was an ill-conditioned, cross-grained, surly fellow—a morose and lonely man, who consorted with nobody but himself, and an old wicker bottle which fitted into his large deep waistcoat pocket—and who eyed each merry face, as it passed him by, with such a deep scowl of malice and ill-humour, as it was difficult to meet, without feeling something the worse for.

A little before twilight, one Christmas Eve, Gabriel shouldered his spade, lighted his lantern, and betook himself towards the old churchyard; for he had got a grave to finish by next morning, and, feeling very low, he thought it might raise his spirits, perhaps, if he went on with his work at once. As he went his way, up the ancient street, he saw the cheerful light of the blazing fires gleam through the old casements, and heard the loud laugh and the cheerful shouts

of those who were assembled around them ; he marked the bustling preparations for next day's cheer, and smelt the numerous savoury odours consequent thereupon, as they steamed up from the kitchen windows in clouds. All this was gall and wormwood to the heart of Gabriel Grub ; and when groups of children bounded out of the houses, tripped across the road, and were met, before they could knock at the opposite door, by half a dozen curly-headed little rascals who crowded round them as they flocked upstairs to spend the evening in their Christmas games, Gabriel smiled grimly, and clutched the handle of his spade with a firmer grasp, as he thought of measles, scarlet-fever, thrush, hooping-cough, and a good many other sources of consolation besides.

In this happy frame of mind, Gabriel strode along : returning a short, sullen growl to the good-humoured greetings of such of his neighbours as now and then passed him : until he turned into the dark lane which led to the churchyard. Now, Gabriel had been looking forward to reaching the dark lane, because it was, generally speaking, a nice, gloomy, mournful place, into which the townspeople did not much care to go, except in broad daylight, and when the sun was shining ; consequently, he was not a little indignant to hear a young urchin roaring out some jolly song about a merry Christmas, in this very sanctuary, which had been called Coffin Lane ever since the days of the old abbey, and the time of the shaven-headed monks. As Gabriel walked on, and the voice drew nearer, he found it proceeded from a small boy, who was hurrying along to join one of the little parties in the old street, and who, partly to keep himself company, and partly to prepare himself for the occasion, was shouting out the song at the highest pitch of his lungs. So Gabriel waited until the boy came up, and then dodged him into a corner, and rapped him over the head with his lantern five or six times, to teach him to modulate his voice. And as the boy hurried away with his hand to his head, singing quite a different sort of tune, Gabriel Grub chuckled very heartily to himself, and entered the churchyard : locking the gate behind him.

He took off his coat, put down his lantern, and getting into the unfinished grave, worked at it for an hour or so, with right goodwill. But the earth was hardened with the

frost, and it was no very easy matter to break it up, and shovel it out; and although there was a moon, it was a very young one, and shed little light upon the grave, which was in the shadow of the church. At any other time, these obstacles would have made Gabriel Grub very moody and miserable, but he was so well pleased with having stopped the small boy's singing, that he took little heed of the scanty progress he had made, and looked down into the grave, when he had finished work for the night, with grim satisfaction: murmuring as he gathered up his things:

Brave lodgings for one, brave lodgings for one,  
A few feet of cold earth, when life is done;  
A stone at the head, a stone at the feet,  
A rich, juicy meal for the worms to eat;  
Rank grass overhead, and damp clay around,  
Brave lodgings for one, these, in holy ground!

'Ho! ho!' laughed Gabriel Grub, as he sat himself down on a flat tombstone which was a favourite resting-place of his; and drew forth his wicker bottle. 'A coffin at Christmas! A Christmas Box. Ho! ho! ho!'

'Ho! ho! ho!' repeated a voice which sounded close behind him.

Gabriel paused, in some alarm, in the act of raising the wicker bottle to his lips: and looked round. The bottom of the oldest grave about him, was not more still and quiet, than the churchyard in the pale moonlight. The cold hoar-frost glistened on the tombstones, and sparkled like rows of gems, among the stone carvings of the old church. The snow lay hard and crisp upon the ground; and spread over the thickly-strewn mounds of earth so white and smooth a cover that it seemed as if corpses lay there, hidden only by their winding sheets. Not the faintest rustle broke the profound tranquillity of the solemn scene. Sound itself appeared to be frozen up, all was so cold and still.

'It was the echoes,' said Gabriel Grub, raising the bottle to his lips again.

'It was *not*,' said a deep voice.

Gabriel started up, and stood rooted to the spot with astonishment and terror; for his eyes rested on a form that made his blood run cold.

Seated on an upright tombstone, close to him, was a

strange unearthly figure, whom Gabriel felt at once, was no being of this world. His long fantastic legs which might have reached the ground, were cocked up, and crossed after a quaint, fantastic fashion; his sinewy arms were bare; and his hands rested on his knees. On his short round body, he wore a close covering, ornamented with small slashes; a short cloak dangled at his back; the collar was cut into curious peaks, which served the goblin in lieu of ruff or neckerchief: and his shoes curled up at his toes into long points. On his head, he wore a broad-brimmed sugar-loaf hat, garnished with a single feather. The hat was covered with the white frost; and the goblin looked as if he had sat on the same tombstone very comfortably, for two or three hundred years. He was sitting perfectly still; his tongue was put out, as if in derision; and he was grinning at Gabriel Grub with such a grin as only a goblin could call up.

'It was *not* the echoes,' said the goblin.

Gabriel Grub was paralysed, and could make no reply.

'What do you here on Christmas Eve?' said the goblin sternly.

'I came to dig a grave, sir,' stammered Gabriel Grub.

'What man wanders among graves and churchyards on such a night as this?' cried the goblin.

'Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!' screamed a wild chorus of voices that seemed to fill the churchyard. Gabriel looked fearfully round—nothing was to be seen.

'What have you got in that bottle?' said the goblin.

'Hollands, sir,' replied the sexton, trembling more than ever; for he had bought it of the smugglers, and he thought that perhaps his questioner might be in the excise department of the goblins.

'Who drinks Hollands alone, and in a churchyard, on such a night as this?' said the goblin.

'Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!' exclaimed the wild voices again.

The goblin leered maliciously at the terrified sexton, and then raising his voice, exclaimed:

'And who, then, is our fair and lawful prize?'

To this inquiry the invisible chorus replied, in a strain that sounded like the voices of many choristers singing to the mighty swell of the old church organ—a strain that

seemed borne to the sexton's ears upon a wild wind, and to die away as it passed onward ; but the burden of the reply was still the same, 'Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!'

The goblin grinned a broader grin than before, as he said, 'Well, Gabriel, what do you say to this?'

The sexton gasped for breath.

'What do you think of this, Gabriel?' said the goblin, kicking up his feet in the air on either side of the tombstone, and looking at the turned-up points with as much complacency as if he had been contemplating the most fashionable pair of Wellingtons in all Bond Street.

'It's—it's—very curious, sir,' replied the sexton, half dead with fright; 'very curious, and very pretty, but I think I'll go back and finish my work, sir, if you please.'

'Work!' said the goblin, 'what work?'

'The grave, sir; making the grave,' stammered the sexton.

'Oh, the grave, eh?' said the goblin; 'who makes graves at a time when all other men are merry, and takes a pleasure in it?'

Again the mysterious voices replied, 'Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!'

'I'm afraid my friends want you, Gabriel,' said the goblin, thrusting his tongue further into his cheek than ever—and a most astonishing tongue it was—'I'm afraid my friends want you, Gabriel,' said the goblin.

'Under favour, sir,' replied the horror-stricken sexton, 'I don't think they can, sir; they don't know me, sir; I don't think the gentlemen have ever seen me, sir.'

'Oh yes they have,' replied the goblin; 'we know the man with the sulky face and grim scowl, that came down the street to-night, throwing his evil looks at the children, and grasping his burying spade the tighter. We know the man who struck the boy in the envious malice of his heart, because the boy could be merry, and he could not. We know him, we know him.'

Here, the goblin gave a loud shrill laugh, which the echoes returned twenty-fold: and throwing his legs up in the air, stood upon his head, or rather upon the very point of his sugar-loaf hat, on the narrow edge of the tombstone: whence he threw a somerset with extraordinary agility, right to the sexton's feet, at which he planted himself in



the attitude in which tailors generally sit upon the shop-board.

'I—I—am afraid I must leave you, sir,' said the sexton, making an effort to move.

'Leave us!' said the goblin, 'Gabriel Grub going to leave us. Ho! ho! ho!'

As the goblin laughed, the sexton observed, for one instant, a brilliant illumination within the windows of the church, as if the whole building were lighted up; it disappeared, the organ pealed forth a lively air, and whole troops of goblins, the very counterpart of the first one, poured into the churchyard, and began playing at leap-frog with the tombstones: never stopping for an instant to take breath, but 'overing' the highest among them, one after the other, with the utmost marvellous dexterity. The first goblin was a most astonishing leaper, and, none of the others could come near him; even in the extremity of his terror the sexton could not help observing, that while his friends were content to leap over the common-sized grave-stones, the first one took the family vaults, iron railings and all, with as much ease as if they had been so many street posts.

At last the game reached to a most exciting pitch; the organ played quicker and quicker; and the goblins leaped faster and faster: coiling themselves up, rolling head over heels upon the ground, and bounding over the tombstones like footballs. The sexton's brain whirled round with the rapidity of the motion he beheld, and his legs reeled beneath him, as the spirits flew before his eyes: when the goblin king, suddenly darting towards him, laid his hand upon his collar, and sank with him through the earth.

When Gabriel Grub had had time to fetch his breath, which the rapidity of his descent had for the moment taken away, he found himself in what appeared to be a large cavern, surrounded on all sides by crowds of goblins, ugly and grim; in the centre of the room, on an elevated seat, was stationed his friend of the churchyard; and close beside him stood Gabriel Grub himself, without power of motion.

'Cold to-night,' said the king of the goblins, 'very cold. A glass of something warm, here!'

At this command, half a dozen officious goblins, with a

perpetual smile upon their faces, whom Gabriel Grub imagined to be courtiers, on that account, hastily disappeared, and presently returned with a goblet of liquid fire, which they presented to the king.

'Ah!' cried the goblin, whose cheeks and throat were transparent, as he tossed down the flame, 'This warms one, indeed! Bring a bumper of the same, for Mr. Grub.'

It was in vain for the unfortunate sexton to protest that he was not in the habit of taking anything warm at night; one of the goblins held him while another poured the blazing liquid down his throat; the whole assembly screeched with laughter as he coughed and choked, and wiped away the tears which gushed plentifully from his eyes, after swallowing the burning draught.

'And now,' said the king, fantastically poking the taper corner of his sugar-loaf hat into the sexton's eye, and thereby occasioning him the most exquisite pain: 'And now, show the man of misery and gloom, a few of the pictures from our own great storehouse!'

As the goblin said this, a thick cloud which obscured the remoter end of the cavern, rolled gradually away, and disclosed, apparently at a great distance, a small and scantily furnished, but neat and clean apartment. A crowd of little children were gathered round a bright fire, clinging to their mother's gown, and gambolling around her chair. The mother occasionally rose, and drew aside the window-curtain, as if to look for some expected object: a frugal meal was ready spread upon the table; and an elbow-chair was placed near the fire. A knock was heard at the door: the mother opened it, and the children crowded round her, and clapped their hands for joy, as their father entered. He was wet and weary, and shook the snow from his garments, as the children crowded round him, and seizing his cloak, hat, stick, and gloves, with busy zeal, ran with them from the room. Then, as he sat down to his meal before the fire, the children climbed about his knee, and the mother sat by his side, and all seemed happiness and comfort.

But a change came upon the view, almost imperceptibly. The scene was altered to a small bedroom, where the fairest and youngest child lay dying; the roses had fled from his cheek, and the light from his eye: and even as the sexton looked upon him with an interest he had never felt or known

before, he died. His young brothers and sisters crowded round his little bed, and seized his tiny hand, so cold and heavy; but they shrunk back from its touch, and looked with awe on his infant face; for calm and tranquil as it was, and sleeping in rest and peace as the beautiful child seemed to be, they saw that he was dead, and they knew that he was an Angel looking down upon, and blessing them, from a bright and happy Heaven.

Again the light cloud passed across the picture, and again the subject changed. The father and mother were old and helpless now, and the number of those about them was diminished more than half; but content and cheerfulness sat on every face, and beamed in every eye, as they crowded round the fireside, and told and listened to old stories of earlier and bygone days. Slowly and peacefully, the father sank into the grave, and, soon after, the sharer of all his cares and troubles followed him to a place of rest. The few, who yet survived them, knelt by their tomb, and watered the green turf which covered it, with their tears; then rose, and turned away: sadly and mournfully, but not with bitter cries, or despairing lamentations, for they knew that they should one day meet again; and once more they mixed with the busy world, and their content and cheerfulness were restored. The cloud settled upon the picture, and concealed it from the sexton's view.

'What do you think of *that*?' said the goblin, turning his large face towards Gabriel Grub.

Gabriel murmured out something about its being very pretty, and looked somewhat ashamed, as the goblin bent his fiery eyes upon him.

'*You* a miserable man!' said the goblin, in a tone of excessive contempt. 'You!' He appeared disposed to add more, but indignation choked his utterance, so he lifted up one of his very pliable legs, and flourishing it above his head a little, to insure his aim, administered a good sound kick to Gabriel Grub; immediately after which, all the goblins in waiting, crowded round the wretched sexton, and kicked him without mercy: according to the established and invariable custom of courtiers upon earth, who kick whom royalty kicks, and hug whom royalty hugs.

'Show him some more!' said the king of the goblins:

At these words, the cloud was dispelled, and a rich and

beautiful landscape was disclosed to view—there is just such another, to this day, within half a mile of the old abbey town. The sun shone from out the clear blue sky, the water sparkled beneath his rays, and the trees looked greener, and the flowers more gay, beneath his cheering influence. The water rippled on, with a pleasant sound ; the trees rustled in the light wind that murmured among their leaves ; the birds sang upon the boughs ; and the lark carolled on high her welcome to the morning. Yes, it was morning ; the bright, balmy morning of summer ; the minutest leaf, the smallest blade of grass, was instinct with life. The ant crept forth to her daily toil, the butterfly fluttered and basked in the warm rays of the sun ; myriads of insects spread their transparent wings, and revelled in their brief but happy existence. Man walked forth, elated with the scene ; and all was brightness and splendour.

'*You a miserable man !*' said the king of the goblins, in a more contemptuous tone than before. And again the king of the goblins gave his leg a flourish ; again it descended on the shoulders of the sexton ; and again the attendant goblins imitated the example of their chief.

Many a time the cloud went and came, and many a lesson it taught to Gabriel Grub, who, although his shoulders smarted with pain from the frequent applications of the goblins' feet, looked on with an interest that nothing could diminish. He saw that men who worked hard, and earned their scanty bread with lives of labour, were cheerful and happy ; and that to the most ignorant, the sweet face of nature was a never-failing source of cheerfulness and joy. He saw those who had been delicately nurtured, and tenderly brought up, cheerful under privations, and superior to suffering that would have crushed many of a rougher grain, because they bore within their own bosoms the materials of happiness, contentment, and peace. He saw that women, the tenderest and most fragile of all God's creatures, were the oftenest superior to sorrow, adversity, and distress ; and he saw that it was because they bore, in their own hearts, an inexhaustible well-spring of affection and devotion. Above all, he saw that men like himself, who snarled at the mirth and cheerfulness of others, were the foulest weeds on the fair surface of the earth ; and setting all the good of the world against the evil, he came to the conclusion

that it was a very decent and respectable sort of world after all. No sooner had he formed it, than the cloud which closed over the last picture, seemed to settle on his senses, and lull him to repose. One by one, the goblins faded from his sight; and as the last one disappeared, he sunk to sleep.

The day had broken when Gabriel Grub awoke, and found himself lying, at full length on the flat gravestone in the churchyard, with the wicker bottle lying empty by his side, and his coat, spade, and lantern, all well whitened by the last night's frost, scattered on the ground. The stone on which he had first seen the goblin seated, stood bolt upright before him, and the grave at which he had worked, the night before, was not far off. At first, he began to doubt the reality of his adventures, but the acute pain in his shoulders when he attempted to rise, assured him that the kicking of the goblins was certainly not ideal. He was staggered again, by observing no traces of footsteps in the snow on which the goblins had played at leap-frog with the gravestones, but he speedily accounted for this circumstance when he remembered that, being spirits, they would leave no visible impression behind them. So, Gabriel Grub got on his feet as well as he could, for the pain in his back; and brushing the frost off his coat, put it on, and turned his face towards the town.

But he was an altered man, and he could not bear the thought of returning to a place where his repentance would be scoffed at, and his reformation disbelieved. He hesitated for a few moments; and then turned away to wander where he might, and seek his bread elsewhere.

The lantern, the spade, and the wicker bottle, were found, that day, in the churchyard. There were a great many speculations about the sexton's fate, at first, but it was speedily determined that he had been carried away by the goblins; and there were not wanting some very credible witnesses who had distinctly seen him whisked through the air on the back of a chestnut horse, blind of one eye, with the hind-quarters of a lion, and the tail of a bear. At length all this was devoutly believed; and the new sexton used to exhibit to the curious, for a trifling emolument, a good-sized piece of the church weathercock which had been accidentally kicked off by the aforesaid horse in his aerial

flight, and picked up by himself in the churchyard, a year or two afterwards.

Unfortunately, these stories were somewhat disturbed by the unlooked-for reappearance of Gabriel Grub himself, some ten years afterwards, a ragged, contented, rheumatic old man. He told his story to the clergyman, and also to the mayor; and in course of time it began to be received, as a matter of history, in which form it has continued down to this very day. The believers in the weathercock tale, having misplaced their confidence once, were not easily prevailed upon to part with it again, so they looked as wise as they could, shrugged their shoulders, touched their foreheads, and murmured something about Gabriel Grub having drunk all the Hollands, and then fallen asleep on the flat tombstone; and they affected to explain what he supposed he had witnessed in the goblin's cavern, by saying that he had seen the world, and grown wiser. But this opinion, which was by no means a popular one at any time, gradually died off; and be the matter how it may, as Gabriel Grub was afflicted with rheumatism to the end of his days, this story has at least one moral, if it teach no better one—and that is, that if a man turn sulky and drink by himself at Christmas time, he may make up his mind to be not a bit the better for it: let the spirits be never so good, or let them be even as many degrees beyond proof, as those which Gabriel Grub saw in the goblin's cavern.

*From The Pickwick Papers.*

JOHN RUSKIN

1819-1900

## THE KING OF THE GOLDEN RIVER

### CHAPTER I

HOW THE AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM OF THE BLACK BROTHERS  
WAS INTERFERED WITH BY SOUTH-WEST WIND, ESQUIRE

IN a secluded and mountainous part of Stiria, there was, in old time, a valley of the most surprising and luxuriant fertility. It was surrounded, on all sides, by steep and rocky mountains, rising into peaks, which were always covered with snow, and from which a number of torrents descended in constant cataracts. One of these fell westward, over the face of a crag so high, that, when the sun had set to everything else, and all below was darkness, his beams still shone full upon this waterfall, so that it looked like a shower of gold. It was, therefore, called by the people of the neighbourhood, the Golden River. It was strange that none of these streams fell into the valley itself. They all descended on the other side of the mountains, and wound away through broad plains and by populous cities. But the clouds were drawn so constantly to the snowy hills, and rested so softly in the circular hollow, that in time of drought and heat, when all the country round was burnt up, there was still rain in the little valley; and its crops were so heavy, and its hay so high, and its apples so red, and its grapes so blue, and its wine so rich, and its honey so sweet, that it was a marvel to every one who beheld it, and was commonly called the Treasure Valley.

The whole of this little valley belonged to three brothers, called Schwartz, Hans, and Gluck. Schwartz and Hans, the two elder brothers, were very ugly men, with overhanging eyebrows and small dull eyes, which were always half shut, so that you couldn't see into *them*, and always fancied they saw very far into *you*. They lived by farming the Treasure Valley, and very good farmers they were. They killed everything that did not pay for its eating. They shot the blackbirds, because they pecked the fruit; and killed the hedgehogs, lest they should suck the cows; they poisoned the crickets for eating the crumbs in the kitchen, and smothered the cicadas, which used to sing all summer in the lime trees. They worked their servants without any wages, till they would not work any more, and then quarrelled with them, and turned them out-of-doors without paying them. It would have been very odd, if with such a farm, and such a system of farming, they hadn't got very rich; and very rich they *did* get. They generally contrived to keep their corn by them till it was very dear, and then sell it for twice its value; they had heaps of gold lying about on their floors, yet it was never known that they had given so much as a penny or a crust in charity; they never went to mass; grumbled perpetually at paying tithes; and were, in a word, of so cruel and grinding a temper, as to receive from all those with whom they had any dealings, the nick-name of the 'Black Brothers'. The youngest brother, Gluck, was as completely opposed, in both appearance and character, to his seniors as could possibly be imagined or desired. He was not above twelve years old, fair, blue eyed, and kind in temper to every living thing. He did not, of course, agree particularly well with his brothers, or rather, they did not agree with *him*. He was usually appointed to the honourable office of turnspit, when there was anything to roast, which was not often; for, to do the brothers justice, they were hardly less sparing upon themselves than upon other people. At other times he used to clean the shoes, floors, and sometimes the plates, occasionally getting what was left on them, by way of encouragement, and a wholesome quantity of dry blows, by way of education.

Things went on in this manner for a long time. At last



came a very wet summer, and everything went wrong in the country round. The hay had hardly been got in, when the haystacks were floated bodily down to the sea by an inundation; the vines were cut to pieces with the hail; the corn was all killed by a black blight; only in the Treasure Valley, as usual, all was safe. As it had rain when there was rain nowhere else, so it had sun when there was sun nowhere else. Everybody came to buy corn at the farm, and went away pouring maledictions on the Black Brothers. They asked what they liked, and got it, except from the poor people, who could only beg, and several of whom were starved at their very door, without the slightest regard or notice.

It was drawing towards winter, and very cold weather, when one day the two elder brothers had gone out, with their usual warning to little Gluck, who was left to mind the roast, that he was to let nobody in, and give nothing out. Gluck sat down quite close to the fire, for it was raining very hard, and the kitchen walls were by no means dry or comfortable looking. He turned and turned, and the roast got nice and brown. 'What a pity,' thought Gluck, 'my brothers never ask anybody to dinner. I'm sure, when they've got such a nice piece of mutton as this, and nobody else has got so much as a piece of dry bread, it would do their hearts good to have somebody to eat it with them.'

Just as he spoke, there came a double knock at the house door, yet heavy and dull, as though the knocker had been tied up—more like a puff than a knock. 'It must be the wind,' said Gluck; 'nobody else would venture to knock double knocks at our door.' No; it wasn't the wind: there it came again very hard, and what was particularly astounding, the knocker seemed to be in a hurry, and not to be in the least afraid of the consequences. Gluck went to the window, opened it, and put his head out to see who it was. It was the most extraordinary looking little gentleman he had ever seen in his life. He had a very long nose, slightly brass-coloured, and expanding towards its termination into a development not unlike the lower extremity of a key bugle. His cheeks were very round, and very red, and might have warranted a supposition that he had been

blowing a refractory fire for the last eight-and-forty hours. His eyes twinkled merrily through long silky eyelashes, his moustaches curled twice round like a corkscrew on each side of his mouth, and his hair, of a curious mixed pepper-and-salt colour, descended far over his shoulders. He was about four feet six in height, and wore a conical pointed cap of nearly the same altitude, decorated with a black feather some three feet long. His doublet was prolonged behind into something resembling a violent exaggeration of what is now termed a 'swallow tail', but was much obscured by the swelling folds of an enormous black, glossy-looking cloak, which must have been very much too long in calm weather, as the wind, whistling round the old house, carried it clear out from the wearer's shoulders to about four times his own length.

Gluck was so perfectly paralysed by the singular appearance of his visitor, that he remained fixed without uttering a word, until the old gentleman, having performed another, and a more energetic concerto on the knocker, turned round to look after his fly-away cloak. In so doing he caught sight of Gluck's little yellow head jammed in the window, with its mouth and eyes very wide open indeed.

'Hullo!' said the little gentleman, 'that's not the way to answer the door: I'm wet, let me in.'

To do the little gentleman justice, he *was* wet. His feather hung down between his legs like a beaten puppy's tail, dripping like an umbrella; and from the ends of his moustaches the water was running into his waistcoat pockets, and out again like a mill-stream.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Gluck, 'I'm very sorry, but I really can't.'

'Can't what?' said the old gentleman.

'I can't let you in, sir,—I can't indeed; my brothers would beat me to death, sir, if I thought of such a thing. What do you want, sir?'

'Want?' said the old gentleman petulantly. 'I want fire, and shelter; and there's your great fire there blazing, crackling, and dancing on the walls, with nobody to feel it. Let me in I say; I only want to warm myself.'

Gluck had had his head, by this time, so long out of the window, that he began to feel it was really unpleasantly

cold, and when he turned, and saw the beautiful fire rustling and roaring, and throwing long bright tongues up the chimney, as if it were licking its chops at the savoury smell of the leg of mutton, his heart melted within him that it should be burning away for nothing. 'He does look *very* wet,' said little Gluck; 'I'll just let him in for a quarter of an hour.' Round he went to the door, and opened it; and as the little gentleman walked in, there came a gust of wind through the house, that made the old chimney totter.

'That's a good boy,' said the little gentleman. 'Never mind your brothers. I'll talk to them.'

'Pray, sir, don't do any such thing,' said Gluck. 'I can't let you stay till they come; they'd be the death of me.'

'Dear me,' said the old gentleman, 'I'm very sorry to hear that. How long may I stay?'

'Only till the mutton's done, sir,' replied Gluck, 'and it's very brown.'

Then the old gentleman walked into the kitchen, and sat himself down on the hob, with the top of his cap accommodated up the chimney, for it was a great deal too high for the roof.

'You'll soon dry there, sir,' said Gluck, and sat down again to turn the mutton. But the old gentleman did *not* dry there, but went on drip, drip, dripping among the cinders, and the fire fizzed, and sputtered, and began to look very black, and uncomfortable; never was such a cloak; every fold in it ran like a gutter.

'I beg pardon, sir,' said Gluck at length, after watching the water spreading in long, quicksilver-like streams over the floor for a quarter of an hour; 'mayn't I take your cloak?'

'No, thank you,' said the old gentleman.

'Your cap, sir?'

'I am all right, thank you,' said the old gentleman rather gruffly.

'But,—sir,—I'm very sorry,' said Gluck, hesitatingly; 'but—really, sir,—you're—putting the fire out.'

'It'll take longer to do the mutton then,' replied his visitor drily.

Gluck was very much puzzled by the behaviour of his guest; it was such a strange mixture of coolness and

humility. He turned away at the string meditatively for another five minutes.

'That mutton looks very nice,' said the old gentleman at length. 'Can't you give me a little bit?'

'Impossible, sir,' said Gluck.

'I'm very hungry,' continued the old gentleman. 'I've had nothing to eat yesterday, nor to-day. They surely couldn't miss a bit from the knuckle!'

He spoke in so very melancholy a tone, that it quite melted Gluck's heart. 'They promised me one slice to-day, sir,' said he. 'I can give you that, but not a bit more.'

'That's a good boy,' said the old gentleman again.

Then Gluck warmed a plate, and sharpened a knife. 'I don't care if I do get beaten for it,' thought he. Just as he had cut a large slice out of the mutton, there came a tremendous rap at the door. The old gentleman jumped off the hob, as if it had suddenly become inconveniently warm. Gluck fitted the slice into the mutton again, with desperate efforts at exactitude, and ran to open the door.

'What did you keep us waiting in the rain for?' said Schwartz, as he walked in, throwing his umbrella in Gluck's face. 'Ay! what for, indeed, you little vagabond?' said Hans, administering an educational box on the ear, as he followed his brother into the kitchen.

'Bless my soul!' said Schwartz when he opened the door.

'Amen,' said the little gentleman, who had taken his cap off, and was standing in the middle of the kitchen, bowing with the utmost possible velocity.

'Who's that?' said Schwartz, catching up a rolling-pin, and turning to Gluck with a fierce frown.

'I don't know, indeed, brother,' said Gluck in great terror.

'How did he get in?' roared Schwartz.

'My dear brother,' said Gluck, deprecatingly, 'he was so *very* wet!'

The rolling-pin was descending on Gluck's head; but, at the instant, the old gentleman interposed his conical cap, on which it crashed with a shock that shook the water out of it all over the room. What was very odd, the rolling-pin no sooner touched the cap, than it flew out of Schwartz's hand, spinning like a straw in a high wind, and fell into the corner at the further end of the room.

'Who are you, sir?' demanded Schwartz, turning upon him.

'What's your business?' snarled Hans.

'I'm a poor old man, sir,' the little gentleman began very modestly, 'and I saw your fire through the window, and begged shelter for a quarter of an hour.'

'Have the goodness to walk out again, then,' said Schwartz. 'We've quite enough water in our kitchen, without making it a drying-house.'

'It is a cold day to turn an old man out in, sir; look at my grey hairs.' They hung down to his shoulders, as I told you before.

'Ay!' said Hans, 'there are enough of them to keep you warm. Walk!'

'I'm very, very hungry, sir; couldn't you spare me a bit of bread before I go?'

'Bread, indeed!' said Schwartz; 'do you suppose we've nothing to do with our bread, but to give it to such red-nosed fellows as you?'

'Why don't you sell your feather?' said Hans, sneeringly. 'Out with you!'

'A little bit,' said the old gentleman.

'Be off!' said Schwartz.

'Pray, gentlemen.'

'Off, and be hanged!' cried Hans, seizing him by the collar. But he had no sooner touched the old gentleman's collar, than away he went after the rolling-pin, spinning round and round, till he fell into the corner on the top of it. Then Schwartz was very angry, and ran at the old gentleman to turn him out; but he also had hardly touched him, when away he went after Hans and the rolling-pin, and hit his head against the wall as he tumbled into the corner. And so there they lay, all three.

Then the old gentleman spun himself round with velocity in the opposite direction; continued to spin until his long cloak was all wound neatly about him; clapped his cap on his head, very much on one side (for it could not stand upright without going through the ceiling), gave an additional twist to his cork-screw moustaches, and replied with perfect coolness: 'Gentlemen, I wish you a very good morning. At twelve o'clock to-night, I'll call again; after

such a refusal of hospitality as I have just experienced, you will not be surprised if that visit is the last I ever pay you.'

'If ever I catch you here again,' muttered Schwartz, coming, half-frightened, out of the corner—but, before he could finish his sentence, the old gentleman had shut the house door behind him with a great bang: and there drove past the window, at the same instant, a wreath of ragged cloud, that whirled and rolled away down the valley in all manner of shapes; turning over and over in the air, and melting away at last in a gush of rain.

'A very pretty business, indeed, Mr. Gluck!' said Schwartz. 'Dish the mutton, sir. If ever I catch you at such a trick again—bless me, why, the mutton's been cut!'

'You promised me one slice, brother, you know,' said Gluck. 'Oh! and you were cutting it hot, I suppose, and going to catch all the gravy. It'll be long before I promise you such a thing again. Leave the room, sir; and have the kindness to wait in the coal-cellar till I call you.'

Gluck left the room, melancholy enough. The brothers ate as much mutton as they could, locked the rest in the cupboard, and proceeded to get very drunk after dinner.

Such a night as it was! Howling wind, and rushing rain, without intermission. The brothers had just sense enough left to put up all the shutters, and double bar the door, before they went to bed. They usually slept in the same room. As the clock struck twelve, they were both awakened by a tremendous crash. Their door burst open with a violence that shook the house from top to bottom.

'What's that?' cried Schwartz, starting up in his bed.

'Only I,' said the little gentleman.

The two brothers sat up on their bolster, and stared into the darkness. The room was full of water, and by a misty moonbeam, which found its way through a hole in the shutter, they could see in the midst of it an enormous foam globe, spinning round, and bobbing up and down like a cork, on which, as on a most luxurious cushion, reclined the little old gentleman, cap and all. There was plenty of room for it now, for the roof was off.

'Sorry to incommode you,' said their visitor, ironically. 'I'm afraid your beds are dampish; perhaps you had better go to your brother's room: I've left the ceiling on, there.'

They required no second admonition, but rushed into Gluck's room, wet through, and in an agony of terror.

'You'll find my card on the kitchen table,' the old gentleman called after them. 'Remember, the *last* visit.'

'Pray Heaven it may!' said Schwartz, shuddering. And the foam globe disappeared.

Dawn came at last, and the two brothers looked out of Gluck's little window in the morning. The Treasure Valley was one mass of ruin and desolation. The inundation had swept away trees, crops, and cattle, and left in their stead a waste of red sand and grey mud. The two brothers crept shivering and horror-struck into the kitchen. The water had gutted the whole first floor; corn, money, almost every movable thing had been swept away, and there was left only a small white card on the kitchen table. On it, in large, breezy, long-legged letters, were engraved the words:



## CHAPTER II

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE THREE BROTHERS AFTER THE VISIT OF SOUTH-WEST WIND, ESQUIRE; AND HOW LITTLE GLUCK HAD AN INTERVIEW WITH THE KING OF THE GOLDEN RIVER

SOUTH-WEST WIND, ESQUIRE, was as good as his word. After the momentous visit above related, he entered the Treasure Valley no more; and what was worse, he had so much influence with his relations, the West Winds in particular, and used it so effectually, that they all adopted a similar line of conduct. So no rain fell in the valley from one year's end to another. Though everything remained

green and flourishing in the plains below, the inheritance of the Three Brothers was a desert. What had once been the richest soil in the kingdom, became a shifting heap of red sand; and the brothers, unable longer to contend with the adverse skies, abandoned their valueless patrimony in despair, to seek some means of gaining a livelihood among the cities and people of the plains. All their money was gone, and they had nothing left but some curious old-fashioned pieces of gold plate, the last remnants of their ill-gotten wealth.

'Suppose we turn goldsmiths?' said Schwartz to Hans, as they entered the large city. 'It is a good knave's trade; we can put a great deal of copper into the gold without any one's finding it out.'

The thought was agreed to be a very good one; they hired a furnace, and turned goldsmiths. But two slight circumstances affected their trade: the first, that people did not approve of the coppered gold; the second, that the two elder brothers, whenever they had sold anything, used to leave little Gluck to mind the furnace, and go and drink out the money in the ale-house next door. So they melted all their gold, without making money enough to buy more, and were at last reduced to one large drinking-mug, which an uncle of his had given to little Gluck, and which he was very fond of, and would not have parted with for the world; though he never drank anything out of it but milk and water. The mug was a very odd mug to look at. The handle was formed of two wreaths of flowing golden hair, so finely spun that it looked more like silk than metal, and these wreaths descended into and mixed with a beard and whiskers, of the same exquisite workmanship, which surrounded and decorated a very fierce little face, of the reddest gold imaginable, right in the front of the mug, with a pair of eyes in it which seemed to command its whole circumference. It was impossible to drink out of the mug without being subjected to an intense gaze out of the side of these eyes; and Schwartz positively averred, that once, after emptying it, full of Rhenish, seventeen times, he had seen them wink! When it came to the mug's turn to be made into spoons, it half broke poor little Gluck's heart; but the brothers only laughed at him, tossed the mug into the melting-pot, and



staggered out to the ale-house ; leaving him, as usual, to pour the gold into bars, when it was all ready.

When they were gone, Gluck took a farewell look at his old friend in the melting-pot. The flowing hair was all gone, nothing remained but the red nose, and the sparkling eyes, which looked more malicious than ever. 'And no wonder,' thought Gluck, 'after being treated in that way.' He sauntered disconsolately to the window and sat himself down to catch the fresh evening air, and escape the hot breath of the furnace. Now this window commanded a direct view of the range of mountains, which, as I told you before, overhung the Treasure Valley, and more especially of the peak from which fell the Golden River. It was just at the close of the day, and, when Gluck sat down at the window, he saw the rocks of the mountain-tops, all crimson and purple with the sunset ; and there were bright tongues of fiery cloud burning and quivering about them ; and the river, brighter than all, fell, in a waving column of pure gold, from precipice to precipice, with the double arch of a broad purple rainbow stretched across it, flushing and fading alternately in the wreaths of spray.

'Ah !' said Gluck aloud, after he had looked at it for a little while, 'if that river were really all gold, what a nice thing it would be.'

'No it wouldn't, Gluck,' said a clear metallic voice, close at his ear.

'Bless me, what's that ?' exclaimed Gluck, jumping up. There was nobody there. He looked round the room, and under the table, and a great many times behind him, but there was certainly nobody there, and he sat down again at the window. This time he didn't speak, but he couldn't help thinking again that it would be very convenient if the river were really all gold.

'Not at all, my boy,' said the same voice, louder than before.

'Bless me !' said Gluck again, 'what is that ?' He looked again into all the corners, and cupboards, and then began turning round, and round, as fast as he could, in the middle of the room, thinking there was somebody behind him, when the same voice struck again on his ear. It was singing now very merrily 'Lala-lira-la' ; no words, only

a soft running effervescent melody, something like that of a kettle on the boil. Gluck looked out of the window. No, it was certainly in the house. Upstairs and downstairs. No, it was certainly in that very room, coming in quicker time, and clearer notes, every moment. 'Lala-lira-la.' All at once it struck Gluck that it sounded louder near the furnace. He ran to the opening and looked in: yes, he saw right, it seemed to be coming, not only out of the furnace, but out of the pot. He uncovered it, and ran back in a great fright, for the pot was certainly singing! He stood in the farthest corner of the room, with his hands up, and his mouth open, for a minute or two, when the singing stopped, and the voice became clear, and pronounciative.

'Hollo!' said the voice.

Gluck made no answer.

'Hollo! Gluck, my boy,' said the pot again.

Gluck summoned all his energies, walked straight up to the crucible, drew it out of the furnace, and looked in. The gold was all melted, and its surface as smooth and polished as a river; but instead of reflecting little Gluck's head, as he looked in, he saw meeting his glance, from beneath the gold, the red nose and sharp eyes of his old friend of the mug, a thousand times redder and sharper than ever he had seen them in his life.

'Come, Gluck, my boy,' said the voice out of the pot again, 'I'm all right; pour me out.'

But Gluck was too much astonished to do anything of the kind.

'Pour me out, I say,' said the voice rather gruffly.

Still Gluck couldn't move.

'*Will* you pour me out?' said the voice passionately, 'I'm too hot.'

By a violent effort, Gluck recovered the use of his limbs, took hold of the crucible, and sloped it, so as to pour out the gold. But instead of a liquid stream, there came out, first, a pair of pretty little yellow legs, then some coat tails, then a pair of arms stuck akimbo, and, finally, the well-known head of his friend the mug; all which articles, uniting as they rolled out, stood up energetically on the floor, in the shape of a little golden dwarf, about a foot and a half high.

'That's right!' said the dwarf, stretching out first his legs, and then his arms, and then shaking his head up and down, and as far round as it would go, for five minutes, without stopping; apparently with the view of ascertaining if he were quite correctly put together, while Gluck stood contemplating him in speechless amazement. He was dressed in a slashed doublet of spun gold, so fine in its texture, that the prismatic colours gleamed over it, as if on a surface of mother-of-pearl; and over this brilliant doublet, his hair and beard fell full half-way to the ground, in waving curls, so exquisitely delicate, that Gluck could hardly tell where they ended; they seemed to melt into air. The features of the face, however, were by no means finished with the same delicacy; they were rather coarse, slightly inclining to coppery in complexion, and indicative, in expression, of a very pertinacious and intractable disposition in their small proprietor. When the dwarf had finished his self-examination he turned his small sharp eyes full on Gluck, and stared at him deliberately for a minute or two. 'No, it wouldn't, Gluck, my boy,' said the little man.

This was certainly rather an abrupt and unconnected mode of commencing conversation. It might indeed be supposed to refer to the course of Gluck's thoughts, which had first produced the dwarf's observations out of the pot; but whatever it referred to, Gluck had no inclination to dispute the dictum.

'Wouldn't it, sir?' said Gluck, very mildly and submissively indeed.

'No,' said the dwarf, conclusively. 'No, it wouldn't.' And with that, the dwarf pulled his cap hard over his brows, and took two turns, of three feet long, up and down the room, lifting his legs up very high, and setting them down very hard. This pause gave time for Gluck to collect his thoughts a little; and, seeing no great reason to view his diminutive visitor with dread, and feeling his curiosity overcome his amazement, he ventured on a question of peculiar delicacy.

'Pray, sir,' said Gluck, rather hesitatingly, 'were you my mug?'

On which the little man turned sharp round, walked straight up to Gluck, and drew himself up to his full

height. 'I,' said the little man, 'am the King of the Golden River.' Whereupon he turned about again, and took two more turns, some six feet long, in order to allow time for the consternation which this announcement produced in his auditor to evaporate. After which, he again walked up to Gluck and stood still, as if expecting some comment on his communication.

Gluck determined to say something at all events. 'I hope your Majesty is very well,' said Gluck.

'Listen!' said the little man, deigning no reply to this polite inquiry. 'I am the King of what you mortals call the Golden River. The shape you saw me in was owing to the malice of a stronger king, from whose enchantments you have this instant freed me. What I have seen of you, and your conduct to your wicked brothers, renders me willing to serve you; therefore attend to what I tell you. Whoever shall climb to the top of that mountain from which you see the Golden River issue, and shall cast into that stream at its source three drops of holy water, for him, and for him only, the river shall turn into gold. But no one failing in his first, can succeed in a second attempt; and if any one shall cast unholy water into the river, it will overwhelm him and he will become a black stone.' So saying, the King of the Golden River turned away, and deliberately walked into the centre of the hottest flame of the furnace. His figure became red, white, transparent, dazzling—a blaze of intense light—rose, trembled, and disappeared. The King of the Golden River had evaporated.

'Oh!' cried poor Gluck, running to look up the chimney after him; 'Oh, dear, dear, dear me! My mug! my mug! my mug!'

### CHAPTER III

HOW MR. HANS SET OFF ON AN EXPEDITION TO THE GOLDEN RIVER, AND HOW HE PROSPERED THEREIN

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN RIVER had hardly made the extraordinary exit related in the last chapter, before Hans

and Schwartz came roaring into the house, very savagely drunk. The discovery of the total loss of their last piece of plate had the effect of sobering them just enough to enable them to stand over Gluck, beating him very steadily for a quarter of an hour ; at the expiration of which period they dropped into a couple of chairs, and requested to know what he had got to say for himself. Gluck told them his story, of which of course they did not believe a word. They beat him again, till their arms were tired, and staggered to bed. In the morning, however, the steadiness with which he adhered to his story obtained him some degree of credence ; the immediate consequence of which was, that the two brothers, after wrangling a long time on the knotty question, which of them should try his fortune first, drew their swords and began fighting. The noise of the fray alarmed the neighbours, who, finding they could not pacify the combatants, sent for the constable.

Hans, on hearing this, contrived to escape, and hid himself ; but Schwartz was taken before the magistrate, fined for breaking the peace, and having drunk out his last penny the evening before, was thrown into prison till he should pay.

When Hans heard this, he was much delighted, and determined to set out immediately for the Golden River. How to get the holy water was the question. He went to the priest, but the priest could not give any holy water to so abandoned a character. So Hans went to vespers in the evening for the first time in his life, and, under pretence of crossing himself, stole a cupful, and returned home in triumph.

Next morning he got up before the sun rose, put the holy water into a strong flask, and two bottles of wine and some meat in a basket, slung them over his back, took his alpine staff in his hand, and set off for the mountains.

On his way out of the town he had to pass the prison, and as he looked in at the windows, whom should he see but Schwartz himself peeping out of the bars, and looking very disconsolate.

‘Good morning, brother,’ said Hans ; ‘have you any message for the King of the Golden River?’

Schwartz gnashed his teeth with rage, and shook the bars

with all his strength ; but Hans only laughed at him, and, advising him to make himself comfortable till he came back again, shouldered his basket, shook the bottle of holy water in Schwartz's face till it frothed again, and marched off in the lightest spirits in the world.

It was, indeed, a morning that might have made any one happy, even with no Golden River to seek for. Level lines of dewy mist lay stretched along the valley, out of which rose the massy mountains—their lower cliffs in pale-grey shadow, hardly distinguishable from the floating vapour, but gradually ascending till they caught the sunlight, which ran in sharp touches of ruddy colour, along the angular crags, and pierced, in long level rays, through their fringes of spear-like pine. Far above, shot up red splintered masses of castellated rock, jagged and shivered into myriads of fantastic forms, with here and there a streak of sunlit snow, traced down their chasms like a line of forked lightning ; and, far beyond, and far above all these, fainter than the morning cloud, but purer and changeless, slept, in the blue sky, the utmost peaks of the eternal snow.

The Golden River, which sprang from one of the lower and snowless elevations, was now nearly in shadow ; all but the uppermost jets of spray, which rose like slow smoke above the undulating line of the cataract, and floated away in feeble wreaths upon the morning wind.

On this object, and on this alone, Hans' eyes and thoughts were fixed ; forgetting the distance he had to traverse, he set off at an imprudent rate of walking, which greatly exhausted him before he had scaled the first range of the green and low hills. He was, moreover, surprised, on surmounting them, to find that a large glacier, of whose existence, notwithstanding his previous knowledge of the mountains, he had been absolutely ignorant, lay between him and the source of the Golden River. He entered on it with the boldness of a practised mountaineer ; yet he thought he had never traversed so strange, or so dangerous a glacier in his life. The ice was excessively slippery, and out of all its chasms came wild sounds of gushing water ; not monotonous or low, but changeful and loud, rising occasionally into drifting passages of wild melody, then breaking off into short melancholy tones, or sudden shrieks,

resembling those of human voices in distress or pain. The ice was broken into thousands of confused shapes, but none, Hans thought, like the ordinary forms of splintered ice. There seemed a curious *expression* about all their outlines—a perpetual resemblance to living features, distorted and scornful. Myriads of deceitful shadows, and lurid lights, played and floated about and through the pale blue pinnacles, dazzling and confusing the sight of the traveller; while his ears grew dull and his head giddy with the constant gush and roar of the concealed waters. These painful circumstances increased upon him as he advanced; the ice crashed and yawned into fresh chasms at his feet, tottering spires nodded around him, and fell thundering across his path; and though he had repeatedly faced these dangers on the most terrific glaciers, and in the wildest weather, it was with a new and oppressive feeling of panic terror that he leaped the last chasm, and flung himself, exhausted and shuddering, on the firm turf of the mountain.

He had been compelled to abandon his basket of food, which became a perilous encumbrance on the glacier, and had now no means of refreshing himself but by breaking off and eating some of the pieces of ice. This, however, relieved his thirst; an hour's repose recruited his hardy frame, and, with the indomitable spirit of avarice, he resumed his laborious journey.

His way now lay straight up a ridge of bare red rocks, without a blade of grass to ease the foot, or a projecting angle to afford an inch of shade from the south sun. It was past noon, and the rays beat intensely upon the steep path, while the whole atmosphere was motionless, and penetrated with heat. Intense thirst was soon added to the bodily fatigue with which Hans was now afflicted; glance after glance he cast on the flask of water which hung at his belt. 'Three drops are enough,' at last thought he; 'I may at least cool my lips with it.'

He opened the flask, and was raising it to his lips, when his eye fell on an object lying on the rock beside him; he thought it moved. It was a small dog, apparently in the last agony of death from thirst. Its tongue was out, its jaws dry, its limbs extended lifelessly, and a swarm of black ants were crawling about its lips and throat. Its eye moved

to the bottle which Hans held in his hand. He raised it, drank, spurned the animal with his foot, and passed on. And he did not know how it was, but he thought that a strange shadow had suddenly come across the blue sky.

The path became steeper and more rugged every moment; and the high hill air, instead of refreshing him, seemed to throw his blood into a fever. The noise of the hill cataracts sounded like mockery in his ears: they were all distant, and his thirst increased every moment. Another hour passed, and he again looked down to the flask at his side; it was half empty, but there was much more than three drops in it. He stopped to open it, and again, as he did so, something moved in the path above him. It was a fair child, stretched nearly lifeless on the rock, its breast heaving with thirst, its eyes closed, and its lips parched and burning. Hans eyed it deliberately, drank, and passed on. And a dark grey cloud came over the sun, and long, snake-like shadows crept up along the mountain sides. Hans struggled on. The sun was sinking, but its descent seemed to bring no coolness; the leaden weight of the dead air pressed upon his brow and heart, but the goal was near. He saw the cataract of the Golden River spring from the hill-side, scarcely five hundred feet above him. He paused for a moment to breathe and sprang on to complete his task.

At this instant a faint cry fell on his ear. He turned, and saw a grey-haired old man extended on the rocks. His eyes were sunk, his features deadly pale, and gathered into an expression of despair. 'Water!' he stretched his arms to Hans, and cried feebly, 'Water! I am dying.'

'I have none,' replied Hans; 'thou hast had thy share of life.' He strode over the prostrate body, and darted on. And a flash of blue lightning rose out of the East, shaped like a sword; it shook thrice over the whole heaven, and left it dark with one heavy, impenetrable shade. The sun was setting; it plunged towards the horizon like a red-hot ball.

The roar of the Golden River rose on Hans' ear. He stood at the brink of the chasm through which it ran. Its waves were filled with the red glory of the sunset: they shook their crests like tongues of fire, and flashes of bloody



light gleamed along their foam. Their sound came mightier and mightier on his senses ; his brain grew giddy with the prolonged thunder. Shuddering, he drew the flask from his girdle, and hurled it into the centre of the torrent. As he did so, an icy chill shot through his limbs ; he staggered, shrieked, and fell. The waters closed over his cry. And the moaning of the river rose wildly into the night, as it gushed over

### THE BLACK STONE.

## CHAPTER IV

HOW MR. SCHWARTZ SET OFF ON AN EXPEDITION TO THE  
GOLDEN RIVER, AND HOW HE PROSPERED THEREIN

POOR little Gluck waited very anxiously alone in the house, for Hans' return. Finding he did not come back, he was terribly frightened, and went and told Schwartz in the prison all that had happened. Then Schwartz was very much pleased, and said that Hans must certainly have been turned into a black stone, and he should have all the gold to himself. But Gluck was very sorry, and cried all night. When he got up in the morning, there was no bread in the house, nor any money ; so Gluck went, and hired himself to another goldsmith, and he worked so hard, and so neatly, and so long every day, that he soon got money enough together to pay his brother's fine, and he went, and gave it all to Schwartz, and Schwartz got out of prison. Then Schwartz was quite pleased, and said he should have some of the gold of the river. But Gluck only begged he would go and see what had become of Hans.

Now when Schwartz had heard that Hans had stolen the holy water, he thought to himself that such a proceeding might not be considered altogether correct by the King of the Golden River, and determined to manage matters better. So he took some more of Gluck's money, and went to a bad priest, who gave him some holy water very readily for it. Then Schwartz was sure it was all quite right. So Schwartz got up early in the morning before the sun rose, and took

some bread and wine in a basket, and put his holy water in a flask, and set off for the mountains. Like his brother he was much surprised at the sight of the glacier, and had great difficulty in crossing it, even after leaving his basket behind him. The day was cloudless, but not bright: there was a heavy purple haze hanging over the sky, and the hills looked lowering and gloomy. And as Schwartz climbed the steep rock path, the thirst came upon him as it had upon his brother, until he lifted his flask to his lips to drink. Then he saw the fair child lying near him on the rocks, and it cried to him, and moaned for water.

'Water indeed,' said Schwartz; 'I haven't half enough for myself,' and passed on. And as he went he thought the sunbeams grew more dim, and he saw a low bank of black cloud rising out of the West; and, when he had climbed for another hour, the thirst overcame him again, and he would have drunk. Then he saw the old man lying before him on the path, and heard him cry out for water. 'Water, indeed,' said Schwartz, 'I haven't half enough for myself,' and on he went.

Then again the light seemed to fade from before his eyes, and he looked up, and, behold, a mist, of the colour of blood, had come over the sun; and the bank of black cloud had risen very high, and its edges were tossing and tumbling like the waves of the angry sea. And they cast long shadows, which flickered over Schwartz's path.

Then Schwartz climbed for another hour, and again his thirst returned; and as he lifted his flask to his lips, he thought he saw his brother Hans lying exhausted on the path before him, and, as he gazed, the figure stretched its arms to him, and cried for water. 'Ha, ha,' laughed Schwartz, 'are you there? remember the prison bars, my boy. Water, indeed! do you suppose I carried it all the way up here for *you*?' And he strode over the figure; yet, as he passed, he thought he saw a strange expression of mockery about its lips. And, when he had gone a few yards farther, he looked back; but the figure was not there.

And a sudden horror came over Schwartz, he knew not why; but the thirst for gold prevailed over his fear, and he rushed on. And the bank of black cloud rose to the zenith, and out of it came bursts of spiry lightning, and waves of

darkness seemed to heave and float, between their flashes, over the whole heavens. And the sky where the sun was setting was all level, and like a lake of blood ; and a strong wind came out of that sky, tearing its crimson clouds into fragments, and scattering them far into the darkness. And when Schwartz stood by the brink of the Golden River, its waves were black, like thunder clouds, but their foam was like fire ; and the roar of the waters below, and the thunder above met, as he cast the flask into the stream. And, as he did so, the lightning glared in his eyes, and the earth gave way beneath him, and the waters closed over his cry. And the moaning of the river rose wildly into the night, as it gushed over the

TWO BLACK STONES.

## CHAPTER V

HOW LITTLE GLUCK SET OFF ON AN EXPEDITION TO THE  
GOLDEN RIVER, AND HOW HE PROSPERED THEREIN ; WITH  
OTHER MATTERS OF INTEREST

WHEN Gluck found that Schwartz did not come back, he was very sorry, and did not know what to do. He had no money, and was obliged to go and hire himself again to the goldsmith, who worked him very hard, and gave him very little money. So, after a month or two, Gluck grew tired, and made up his mind to go and try his fortune with the Golden River. 'The little king looked very kind,' thought he. 'I don't think he will turn me into a black stone.' So he went to the priest, and the priest gave him some holy water as soon as he asked for it. Then Gluck took some bread in his basket, and the bottle of water, and set off very early for the mountains.

If the glacier had occasioned a great deal of fatigue to his brothers, it was twenty times worse for him, who was neither so strong nor so practised on the mountains. He had several very bad falls, lost his basket and bread, and was very much frightened at the strange noises under the

ice. He lay a long time to rest on the grass, after he had got over, and began to climb the hill just in the hottest part of the day. When he had climbed for an hour, he got dreadfully thirsty, and was going to drink like his brothers, when he saw an old man coming down the path above him, looking very feeble, and leaning on a staff. 'My son,' said the old man, 'I am faint with thirst, give me some of that water.' Then Gluck looked at him, and when he saw that he was pale and weary, he gave him the water: 'Only pray don't drink it all,' said Gluck. But the old man drank a great deal, and gave him back the bottle two-thirds empty. Then he bade him good speed, and Gluck went on again merrily. And the path became easier to his feet, and two or three blades of grass appeared upon it, and some grasshoppers began singing on the bank beside it; and Gluck thought he had never heard such merry singing.

Then he went on for another hour, and the thirst increased on him so that he thought he should be forced to drink. But, as he raised the flask, he saw a little child lying panting by the road-side, and it cried out piteously for water. Then Gluck struggled with himself, and determined to bear the thirst a little longer; and he put the bottle to the child's lips, and it drank it all but a few drops. Then it smiled on him, and got up, and ran down the hill; and Gluck looked after it, till it became as small as a little star, and then turned, and began climbing again. And then there were all kinds of sweet flowers growing on the rocks, bright green moss, with pale pink starry flowers, and soft belled gentians, more blue than the sky at its deepest, and pure white transparent lilies. And crimson and purple butterflies darted hither and thither, and the sky sent down such pure light, that Gluck had never felt so happy in his life.

Yet, when he had climbed for another hour, his thirst became intolerable again; and, when he looked at his bottle, he saw that there were only five or six drops left in it, and he could not venture to drink. And, as he was hanging the flask to his belt again, he saw a little dog lying on the rocks, gasping for breath—just as Hans had seen it on the day of his ascent. And Gluck stopped and looked at it, and then at the Golden River, not five hundred yards

above him; and he thought of the dwarf's words, 'that no one could succeed, except in his first attempt'; and he tried to pass the dog, but it whined piteously, and Gluck stopped again. 'Poor beastie,' said Gluck, 'it'll be dead when I come down again, if I don't help it.' Then he looked closer and closer at it, and its eye turned on him so mournfully, that he could not stand it. 'Confound the King and his gold too,' said Gluck; and he opened the flask, and poured all the water into the dog's mouth.

The dog sprang up and stood on its hind legs. Its tail disappeared, its ears became long, longer, silky, golden; its nose became very red, its eyes became very twinkling; in three seconds the dog was gone, and before Gluck stood his old acquaintance, the King of the Golden River.

'Thank you,' said the monarch, 'but don't be frightened, it's all right'; for Gluck showed manifest symptoms of consternation at this unlooked-for reply to his last observation. 'Why didn't you come before,' continued the dwarf, 'instead of sending me those rascally brothers of yours, for me to have the trouble of turning into stones? Very hard stones they make too.'

'Oh dear me!' said Gluck, 'have you really been so cruel?'

'Cruel!' said the dwarf, 'they poured unholy water into my stream: do you suppose I'm going to allow that?'

'Why,' said Gluck, 'I am sure, sir—your majesty, I mean—they got the water out of the church font.'

'Very probably,' replied the dwarf; 'but,' and his countenance grew stern as he spoke, 'the water which has been refused to the cry of the weary and dying, is unholy, though it had been blessed by every saint in heaven; and the water which is found in the vessel of mercy is holy, though it had been defiled with corpses.'

So saying, the dwarf stooped and plucked a lily that grew at his feet. On its white leaves there hung three drops of clear dew. And the dwarf shook them into the flask which Gluck held in his hand. 'Cast these into the river,' he said, 'and descend on the other side of the mountains into the Treasure Valley. And so good speed.'

As he spoke, the figure of the dwarf became indistinct. The playing colours of his robe formed themselves into

a prismatic mist of dewy light; he stood for an instant veiled with them as with the belt of a broad rainbow. The colours grew faint, the mist rose into the air; the monarch had evaporated.

And Gluck climbed to the brink of the Golden River, and its waves were as clear as crystal, and as brilliant as the sun. And, when he cast the three drops of dew into the stream, there opened where they fell a small circular whirlpool, into which the waters descended with a musical noise. Gluck stood watching it for some time, very much disappointed, because not only the river was not turned into gold, but its waters seemed much diminished in quantity. Yet he obeyed his friend the dwarf, and descended the other side of the mountains, towards the Treasure Valley; and, as he went, he thought he heard the noise of water working its way under the ground. And, when he came in sight of the Treasure Valley, behold, a river, like the Golden River, was springing from a new cleft of the rocks above it, and was flowing in innumerable streams among the dry heaps of red sand. And as Gluck gazed, fresh grass sprang beside the new streams, and creeping plants grew, and climbed among the moistening soil. Young flowers opened suddenly along the river sides, as stars leap out when twilight is deepening, and thickets of myrtle, and tendrils of vine, cast lengthening shadows over the valley as they grew. And thus the Treasure Valley became a garden again, and the inheritance, which had been lost by cruelty, was regained by love. And Gluck went, and dwelt in the valley, and the poor were never driven from his door; so that his barns became full of corn, and his house of treasure. And, for him, the river had, according to the dwarf's promise, become a River of Gold. And, to this day, the inhabitants of the valley point to the place where the three drops of holy dew were cast into the stream, and trace the course of the Golden River under the ground, until it emerges in the Treasure Valley. And, at the top of the cataract of the Golden River, are still to be seen Two BLACK STONES, round which the waters howl mournfully every day at sunset; and these stones are still called by the people of the valley

THE BLACK BROTHERS.

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THE BLACK BROTHERS.



# FRANK R. STOCKTON

1834-1902

## THE LADY, OR THE TIGER?

IN the very olden time there lived a semi-barbaric king whose ideas, though somewhat polished and sharpened by the progressiveness of distant Latin neighbours, were still large, florid, and untrammelled, as became the half of him which was barbaric. He was a man of exuberant fancy, and, withal, of an authority so irresistible that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts. He was greatly given to self-communing; and when he and himself agreed upon anything, the thing was done. When every member of his domestic and political systems moved smoothly in its appointed course, his nature was bland and genial; but whenever there was a little hitch, and some of his orbs got out of their orbits, he was blander and more genial still, for nothing pleased him so much as to make the crooked straight, and crush down uneven places.

Among the borrowed notions by which his barbarism had become semified was that of the public arena, in which, by exhibitions of manly and beastly valour, the minds of his subjects were refined and cultured.

But even here the exuberant and barbaric fancy asserted itself. The arena of the king was built, not to give the people an opportunity of hearing the rhapsodies of dying gladiators, nor to enable them to view the inevitable conclusion of a conflict between religious opinions and hungry jaws, but for purposes far better adapted to widen and develop the mental energies of the people. This vast amphitheatre, with its encircling galleries, its mysterious vaults, and its unseen passages, was an agent of poetic

justice, in which crime was punished, or virtue rewarded, by the decrees of an impartial and incorruptible chance.

When a subject was accused of a crime of sufficient importance to interest the king, public notice was given that on an appointed day the fate of the accused person would be decided in the king's arena—a structure which well deserved its name; for, although its form and plan were borrowed from afar, its purpose emanated solely from the brain of this man, who, every barleycorn a king, knew no tradition to which he owed more allegiance than pleased his fancy, and who ingrafted on every adopted form of human thought and action the rich growth of his barbaric idealism.

When all the people had assembled in the galleries, and the king, surrounded by his court, sat high up on his throne of royal state on one side of the arena, he gave a signal, a door beneath him opened, and the accused subject stepped out into the amphitheatre. Directly opposite him, on the other side of the enclosed space, were two doors, exactly alike and side by side. It was the duty and the privilege of the person on trial to walk directly to these two doors and open one of them. He could open either door he pleased: he was subject to no guidance or influence but that of the aforementioned impartial and incorruptible chance. If he opened the one there came out of it a hungry tiger, the fiercest and most cruel that could be procured, which immediately sprang upon him, and tore him to pieces, as a punishment for his guilt. The moment that the case of the criminal was thus decided, doleful iron bells were clanged, great wails went up from the hired mourners posted on the outer rim of the arena, and the vast audience, with bowed heads and downcast hearts, wended slowly their homeward way, mourning greatly that one so young and fair, or so old and respected, should have merited so dire a fate.

But, if the accused person opened the other door, there came forth from it a lady, the most suitable to his years and station that his majesty could select among his fair subjects; and to this lady he was immediately married, as a reward of his innocence. It mattered not that he might already possess a wife and family, or that his affections might be engaged upon an object of his own

selection: the king allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme of retribution and reward. The exercises, as in the other instance, took place immediately, and in the arena. Another door opened beneath the king, and a priest, followed by a band of choristers, and dancing maidens blowing joyous airs on golden horns and treading an epithalamic measure, advanced to where the pair stood, side by side, and the wedding was promptly and cheerily solemnized. Then the gay brass bells rang forth their merry peals, the people shouted gay hurrahs, and the innocent man, preceded by children strewing flowers on his path, led his bride to his home.

This was the king's semi-barbaric method of administering justice. Its perfect fairness is obvious. The criminal could not know out of which door would come the lady: he opened either he pleased, without having the slightest knowledge whether, in the next instant, he was to be devoured or married. On some occasions the tiger came out of one door, and on some out of the other. The decisions of this tribunal were not only fair, they were positively determinate: the accused person was instantly punished if he found himself guilty; and, if innocent, he was rewarded on the spot, whether he liked it or not. There was no escape from the judgements of the king's arena.

The institution was a very popular one. When the people gathered together on one of the great trial days, they never knew whether they were to witness a bloody slaughter or a hilarious wedding. This element of uncertainty lent an interest to the occasion which it could not otherwise have attained. Thus the masses were entertained and pleased, and the thinking part of the community could bring no charge of unfairness against this plan; for did not the accused person have the whole matter in his own hands?

This semi-barbaric king had a daughter as blooming as his most florid fancies, and with a soul as fervent and imperious as his own. As is usual in such cases, she was the apple of his eye, and was loved by him above all humanity. Among his courtiers was a young man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens. This royal maiden was well satisfied with her lover, for he was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all

this kingdom; and she loved him with an ardour that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong. This love affair moved on happily for many months, until one day the king happened to discover its existence. He did not hesitate nor waver in regard to his duty in the premises. The youth was immediately cast into prison, and a day was appointed for his trial in the king's arena. This, of course, was an especially important occasion; and his majesty as well as all the people was greatly interested in the workings and development of this trial. Never before had such a case occurred; never before had a subject dared to love the daughter of a king. In after years such things became commonplace enough; but then they were, in no slight degree, novel and startling.

The tiger-cages of the kingdom were searched for the most savage and relentless beasts, from which the fiercest monster might be selected for the arena; and the ranks of maiden youth and beauty throughout the land were carefully surveyed by competent judges, in order that the young man might have a fitting bride in case fate did not determine for him a different destiny. Of course, everybody knew that the deed with which the accused was charged had been done. He had loved the princess, and neither he, she, nor any one else thought of denying the fact; but the king would not think of allowing any fact of this kind to interfere with the workings of the tribunal, in which he took great delight and satisfaction. No matter how the affair turned out, the youth would be disposed of; and the king would take an aesthetic pleasure in watching the course of events, which would determine whether or not the young man had done wrong in allowing himself to love the princess.

The appointed day arrived. From far and near the people gathered, and thronged the galleries of the arena, and the crowds, unable to gain admittance, massed themselves against its outside walls. The king and his court were in their places opposite the twin doors—those fateful portals so terrible in their similarity. All was ready. The signal was given. A door beneath the royal party opened, and the lover of the princess walked into the arena. Tall, beautiful, fair, his appearance was greeted with a low hum of admiration and anxiety. Half the audience had not known so grand a youth had lived among them. No wonder the

princess loved him ! What a terrible thing for him to be there !

As the youth advanced into the arena, he turned as the custom was to bow to the king : but he did not think at all of that royal personage ; his eyes were fixed upon the princess who sat to the right of her father. Had it not been for the moiety of barbarism in her nature it is probable that the lady would not have been there, but her intense and fervid soul would not allow her to be absent on an occasion in which she was so terribly interested. From the moment the decree had gone forth that her lover should decide his fate in the king's arena, she had thought of nothing night or day but this great event and the various subjects connected with it. Possessed of more power, influence, and force of character than any one who had ever before been interested in such a case, she had done what no other person had done—she had possessed herself of the secret of the doors. She knew in which of the two rooms, that lay behind those doors, stood the cage of the tiger with its open front, and in which waited the lady. Through these thick doors, heavily curtained with skins on the inside, it was impossible that any noise or suggestion should come from within to the person who should approach to raise the latch of one of them ; but gold and the power of a woman's will had brought the secret to the princess.

And not only did she know in which room stood the lady ready to emerge, all blushing and radiant, should her door be opened, but she knew who the lady was. It was one of the fairest and loveliest of the damsels of the court who had been selected as the reward of the accused youth, should he be proved innocent of the crime of aspiring to one so far above him ; and the princess hated her. Often had she seen, or imagined that she had seen, this fair creature throwing glances of admiration upon the person of her lover, and sometimes she thought these glances were perceived, and even returned. Now and then she had seen them talking together ; it was but for a moment or two, but much can be said in a short space ; it may have been on most unimportant topics, but how could she know that ? The girl was lovely, but she had dared to raise her eyes to the loved one of the princess ; and with all the intensity of the savage blood transmitted to her through long lines of wholly barbaric ancestors, she

hated the woman who blushed and trembled behind that silent door.

When her lover turned and looked at her, and his eye met hers as she sat there paler and whiter than any one in the vast ocean of anxious faces about her, he saw, by that power of quick perception which is given to those whose souls are one, that she knew behind which door crouched the tiger, and behind which stood the lady. He had expected her to know it. He understood her nature, and his soul was assured that she would never rest until she had made plain to herself this thing, hidden to all other lookers-on, even to the king. The only hope for the youth in which there was any element of certainty was based on the success of the princess in discovering this mystery; and the moment he looked upon her he saw she had succeeded, as in his soul he knew she would succeed.

Then it was that his quick and anxious glance asked the question, 'Which?' It was as plain to her as if he shouted it from where he stood. There was not an instant to be lost. The question was asked in a flash; it must be answered in another.

Her right arm lay on the cushioned parapet before her. She raised her hand, and made a slight, quick movement toward the right. No one but her lover saw her. Every eye but his was fixed on the man in the arena. He turned, and with a firm and rapid step he walked across the empty space. Every heart stopped beating, every breath was held, every eye was fixed immovably upon that man. Without the slightest hesitation he went to the door on the right and opened it.

Now, the point of the story is this: Did the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady? The more we reflect upon this question, the harder it is to answer. It involves a study of the human heart which leads us through devious mazes of passion, out of which it is difficult to find our way. Think of it, fair reader, not as if the decision of the question depended upon yourself, but upon that hot-blooded semi-barbaric princess, her soul at a white heat beneath the combined fires of despair and jealousy. She had lost him, but who should have him? How often, in her waking hours and in her dreams, had she started in wild horror, and covered

her face with her hands, as she thought of her lover opening the door on the other side of which waited the cruel fangs of the tiger! But how much oftener had she seen him at the other door! How in her grievous reveries had she gnashed her teeth, and torn her hair, when she saw his start of rapturous delight as he opened the door of the lady? How her soul had burned in agony when she had seen him rush to meet that woman, with her flushing cheek and sparkling eye of triumph; when she had seen him lead her forth, his whole frame kindled with the joy of recovered life; when she had heard the glad shouts from the multitude, and the wild ringing of the happy bells; when she had seen the priest, with his joyous followers, advance to the couple, and make them man and wife before her very eyes; and when she had seen them walk away together upon their path of flowers, followed by the tremendous shouts of the hilarious multitude, in which her one despairing shriek was lost and drowned! Would it not be better for him to die at once and go to wait for her in the blessed regions of semi-barbaric futurity? And yet, that awful tiger, those shrieks, that blood!

Her decision had been indicated in an instant, but it had been made after days and nights of anguished deliberation. She had known she would be asked, and she had decided what she would answer, and, without the slightest hesitation, she had moved her hand to the right. The question of her decision is not one to be lightly considered, and it is not for me to presume to set myself up as the one person able to answer it. And so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the opened door—the lady, or the tiger?

## FRANCIS BRET HARTE

1839-1902

### WHO WAS MY QUIET FRIEND?

‘STRANGER!’

The voice was not loud, but clear and penetrating. I looked vainly up and down the narrow, darkening trail. No one in the fringe of alder ahead; no one on the gullied slope behind.

‘O! Stranger!’

This time a little impatiently. The Californian classical vocative ‘O’ always meant business.

I looked up, and perceived for the first time on the ledge, thirty feet above me, another trail parallel with my own, and looking down upon me through the buckeye bushes a small man on a black horse.

Five things to be here noted by the circumspect mountaineer. *First*, the locality—lonely and inaccessible, and away from the regular faring of teamsters and miners. *Secondly*, the stranger’s superior knowledge of the road, from the fact that the other trail was unknown to the ordinary traveller. *Thirdly*, that he was well armed and equipped. *Fourthly*, that he was better mounted. *Fifthly*, that any distrust or timidity arising from the contemplation of these facts had better be kept to oneself.

All this passed rapidly through my mind as I returned his salutation.

‘Got any tobacco?’ he asked.

I had, and signified, the fact, holding up the pouch inquiringly.



'All right, I'll come down. Ride on, and I'll jine ye on the slide.'

'The slide?' Here was a new geographical discovery as odd as the second trail. I had ridden over the trail a dozen times, and seen no communication between the ledge and the trail. Nevertheless, I went on a hundred yards or so, when there was a sharp crackling in the underbrush, a shower of stones on the trail, and my friend plunged through the bushes to my side, down a grade that I should scarcely have dared to lead my horse. There was no doubt he was an accomplished rider—another fact to be noted.

As he ranged beside me, I found I was not mistaken as to his size; he was quite under the medium height, and, but for a pair of cold, grey eyes, was rather commonplace in feature.

'You've got a good horse there,' I suggested.

He was filling his pipe from my pouch, but looked up a little surprised, and said, 'Of course.' He then puffed away with the nervous eagerness of a man long deprived of that sedative. Finally, between the puffs, he asked me whence I came.

I replied, 'From Lagrange.'

He looked at me a few moments curiously, but on my adding that I had only halted there for a few hours, he said: 'I thought I knew every man between Lagrange and Indian Spring, but somehow I sorter disremember your face and your name.'

Not particularly caring that he should remember either, I replied, half laughingly, that, as I lived the other side of Indian Spring, it was quite natural. He took the rebuff, if such it was, so quietly, that as an act of mere perfunctory politeness I asked him where he came from.

'Lagrange.'

'And are you going to ——'

'Well! that depends pretty much on how things pan out, and whether I can make the rifle.' He let his hand rest quite unconsciously on the leathern holster of his dragoon revolver, yet with a strong suggestion to me of his ability 'to make the rifle' if he wanted to, and added: 'But just now I was reck'nin' on taking a little *paseur* with you.'

There was nothing offensive in his speech, save its familiarity, and the reflection, perhaps, that whether I objected or not he was quite able to do as he said. I only replied that if our *paseur* was prolonged beyond Heavytree Hill I should have to borrow his beast. To my surprise he replied quietly, 'That's so,' adding that the horse was at my disposal when he wasn't using it, and *half* of it when he was. 'Dick has carried double many a time before this,' he continued, 'and kin do it again; when your mustang gives out I'll give you a lift, and room to spare.'

I could not help smiling at the idea of appearing before the boys at Red Gulch *en croupe* with the stranger; but neither could I help being oddly affected by the suggestion that his horse had done double duty before. 'On what occasion, and why?' was a question I kept to myself. We were ascending the long, rocky flank of the Divide; the narrowness of the trail obliged us to proceed slowly, and in file, so that there was little chance for conversation, had he been disposed to satisfy my curiosity.

We toiled on in silence, the buckeye giving way to chimal, the westering sun, reflected again from the blank walls beside us, blinding our eyes with its glare. The pines in the cañon below were olive gulfs of heat, over which a hawk here and there drifted lazily, or, rising to our level, cast a weird and gigantic shadow of slowly-moving wings on the mountain-side. The superiority of the stranger's horse led him often far in advance, and made me hope that he might forget me entirely, or push on, growing weary of waiting. But regularly he would halt by a boulder, or reappear from some chinnisal, where he had patiently halted. I was beginning to hate him mildly, when at one of those reappearances he drew up to my side, and asked me how I liked Dickens!

Had he asked my opinion of Huxley or Darwin, I could not have been more astonished. Thinking it was possible that he referred to some local celebrity of Lagrange, I said, hesitatingly—

'You mean ——'

'Charles Dickens. Of-course you've read him? Which of his books do you like best?'

I replied with considerable embarrassment that I liked them all,—as I certainly did.

He grasped my hand for a moment with a fervour quite unlike his usual phlegm, and said, 'That's me, old man: Dickens ain't no slouch. You can count on him pretty much all the time.'

With this rough preface, he launched into a criticism of the novelist, which for intelligent sympathy and hearty appreciation I had rarely heard equalled. Not only did he dwell upon the exuberance of his humour, but upon the power of his pathos and the all-pervading element of his poetry. I looked at the man in astonishment. I had considered myself a rather diligent student of the great master of fiction, but the stranger's felicity of quotation and illustration staggered me. It is true that his thought was not always clothed in the best language, and often appeared in the slouching, slangy undress of the place and period, yet it never was rustic nor homespun, and sometimes struck me with its precision and fitness. Considerably softened toward him, I tried him with other literature. But vainly. Beyond a few of the lyrical and emotional poets, he knew nothing. Under the influence and enthusiasm of his own speech he himself had softened considerably; offered to change horses with me, readjusted my saddle with professional skill, transferred my pack to his own horse, insisted upon my sharing the contents of his whisky flask, and, noticing that I was unarmed, pressed upon me a silver-mounted derringer, which he assured me he could 'warrant'. These various offices of goodwill and the diversion of his talk beguiled me from noticing the fact that the trail was beginning to become obscure and unrecognizable. We were evidently pursuing a route unknown before to me. I pointed out the fact to my companion, a little impatiently. He instantly resumed his old manner and dialect.

'Well, I reckon one trail's as good as another, and what hev ye got to say about it?'

I pointed out, with some dignity, that I preferred the old trail.

'Mebbe you 'did. But you're jiss now takin' a *pasear* with me. This yer trail will bring you right into Indian

Spring, and *onnoticed*, and no questions asked. Don't you mind now, I'll see you through.'

It was necessary here to make some stand against my strange companion. I said firmly, yet as politely as I could, that I had proposed stopping over night with a friend.

'Whar?'

I hesitated. The friend was an eccentric Eastern man well known in the locality for his fastidiousness and his habits as a recluse. A misanthrope, of ample family and ample means, he had chosen a secluded but picturesque valley in the Sierras, where he could rail against the world without opposition. 'Lone Valley,' or 'Boston Ranch' as it was familiarly called, was the one spot that the average miner both respected and feared. Mr. Sylvester, its proprietor, had never affiliated with 'the boys', nor had he ever lost their respect by any active opposition to their ideas. If seclusion had been his object, he certainly was gratified. Nevertheless, in the darkening shadows of the night, and on a lonely and unknown trail, I hesitated a little at repeating his name to a stranger of whom I knew so little. But my mysterious companion took the matter out of my hands.

'Look yar,' he said, suddenly, 'thar ain't but one place 'twixt yer and Indian Spring whar ye can stop, and that's Sylvester's.'

I assented, a little sullenly.

'Well,' said the stranger, quietly, and with a suggestion of conferring a favour on me, 'ef you're pointed for Sylvester's—why—I *don't mind stopping thar with ye*. It's a little off the road—I'll lose some time—but taking it by and large, I don't much mind.'

I stated, as rapidly and as strongly as I could, that my acquaintance with Mr. Sylvester did not justify the introduction of a stranger to his hospitality; that he was unlike most of the people here,—in short, that he was a queer man, &c., &c.

To my surprise my companion answered quietly: 'O, that's all right. I've heerd of him. Ef you don't feel like checking me through, or if you'd rather put 'C.O.D.' on my back, why it's all the same to me. I'll play it alone. Only you just count me in. Say "Sylvester" all the time. That's me!'

What could I oppose to this man's quiet assurance? I felt myself growing red with anger and nervous with embarrassment. What would the correct Sylvester say to me? What would the girls,—I was a young man then, and had won an *entrée* to their domestic circle by my reserve, known by a less complimentary adjective among 'the boys,'—what would they say to my new acquaintance? Yet I certainly could not object to his assuming all risks on his own personal recognizances, nor could I resist a certain feeling of shame at my embarrassment.

We were beginning to descend. In the distance below us already twinkled the lights in the solitary ranches of Lone Valley. I turned to my companion. 'But you have forgotten that I don't even know your name. What am I to call you?'

'That's so,' he said, musingly. 'Now, let's see. "Kearney" would be a good name. It's short and easy like. Thar's a street in 'Frisco the same title; Kearney it is.'

'But ——' I began impatiently.

'Now you leave all that to me,' he interrupted, with a superb self-confidence that I could not but admire. 'The name ain't no account. It's the man that's responsible. Ef I was to lay for a man that I reckoned was named Jones, and after I fetched him I found out on the inquest that his real name was Smith, that wouldn't make no matter, as long as I got the man.'

This illustration, forcible as it was, did not strike me as offering a prepossessing introduction, but we were already at the rancho. The barking of dogs brought Sylvester to the door of the pretty little cottage which his taste had adorned.

I briefly introduced Mr. Kearney. 'Kearney will do—Kearney's good enough for me,' commented the *soi-disant* Kearney half-aloud, to my own horror and Sylvester's evident mystification, and then he blandly excused himself for a moment that he might personally supervise the care of his own beast. When he was out of ear-shot I drew the puzzled Sylvester aside.

'I have picked up—I mean, I have been picked up on the road by a gentle maniac, whose name is not Kearney. He is well armed, and quotes Dickens. With care, acquiescence in his views on all subjects, and general sub-

mission to his commands, he may be placated. Doubtless the spectacle of your helpless family, the contemplation of your daughter's beauty and innocence, may touch his fine sense of humour and pathos. Meanwhile, Heaven help you, and forgive me.'

I ran upstairs to the little den that my hospitable host had kept always reserved for me in my wanderings. I lingered some time over my ablutions, hearing the languid, gentlemanly drawl of Sylvester below, mingled with the equally cool, easy slang of my mysterious acquaintance. When I came down to the sitting-room I was surprised, however, to find the self-styled Kearney quietly seated on the sofa, the gentle May Sylvester, the 'Lily of Lone Valley,' sitting with maidenly awe and unaffected interest on one side of him, while on the other that arrant flirt, my cousin Kate, was practising the pitiless archery of her eyes, with an excitement that seemed almost real.

'Who is your deliciously cool friend?' she managed to whisper to me at supper, as I sat utterly dazed and bewildered between the enrapt May Sylvester, who seemed to hang upon his words, and this giddy girl of the period, who was emptying the battery of her charms in active rivalry upon him. 'Of course, we know his name isn't Kearney. But how romantic! And isn't he perfectly lovely? And who is he?'

I replied with severe irony that I was not aware what foreign potentate was then travelling incognito in the Sierras of California, but that when his royal highness was pleased to inform me, I should be glad to introduce him properly. 'Until then,' I added, 'I fear the acquaintance must be Morganatic.'

'You're only jealous of him,' she said, pertly. 'Look at May—she is completely fascinated. And her father, too.' And actually, the languid, world-sick, cynical Sylvester was regarding him with a boyish interest and enthusiasm almost incompatible with his nature. Yet I submit honestly to the clear-headed reason of my own sex, that I could see nothing more in the man than I have already delivered to the reader.

In the middle of an exciting story of adventure, of which

he, to the already prejudiced mind of his fair auditors, was evidently the hero, he stopped suddenly.

'It's only some pack train passing the bridge on the lower trail,' explained Sylvester; 'go on'.

'It may be my horse is a trifle oneasy in the stable,' said the alleged Kearney; 'he ain't used to boards and covering.' Heaven only knows what wild and delicious revelation lay in the statement of this fact, but the girls looked at each other with cheeks pink with excitement as Kearney arose, and with quiet absence of ceremony quitted the table.

'Ain't he just lovely!' said Kate, gasping for breath, 'and so witty.'

'Witty!' said the gentle May, with just the slightest trace of defiance in her sweet voice; 'witty, my dear? why, don't you see that his heart is just breaking with pathos? Witty, indeed; why, when he was speaking of that poor Mexican woman that was hung, I saw the tears gather in his eyes. Witty, indeed!'

'Tears,' laughed the cynical Sylvester, 'tears, idle tears. Why, you silly children, the man is a man of the world—a philosopher, quiet, observant, unassuming.'

'Unassuming!' Was Sylvester intoxicated, or had the mysterious stranger mixed the 'insane herb' with the family pottage? He returned before I could answer this self-asked inquiry, and resumed coolly his broken narrative. Finding myself forgotten in the man I had so long hesitated to introduce to my friends, I retired to rest early, only to hear, through the thin partitions, two hours later, enthusiastic praises of the new guest from the voluble lips of the girls, as they chatted together in the next room before retiring.

At midnight I was startled by the sound of horses' hoofs and the jingling of spurs below. A conversation between my host and some mysterious personage in the darkness was carried on in such a low tone that I could not learn its import. As the calvacade rode away I raised the window.

'What's the matter?'

'Nothing,' said Sylvester, coolly, 'only another one of those playful homicidal freaks peculiar to the country.'

A man was shot by Cherokee Jack over at Lagrange this morning, and that was the sheriff of Calaveras and his posse hunting him. I told him I'd seen nobody but you and your friend. By the way, I hope the cursed noise hasn't disturbed him. The poor fellow looked as if he wanted rest.

I thought so too. Nevertheless, I went softly to his room. It was empty. My impression was that he had distanced the sheriff of Calaveras about two hours.

*From Tales of the Argonauts and Others.*



# ISABELLA HARWOOD

1840 ?-1888

## THE REVENUE OFFICER'S STORY

THIRTY years ago, when I was an officer of His Majesty's Customs, the maritime counties of England were in a very different condition from that in which we now observe them. The contraband trade was still flourishing; high duties and large prices tempted the smuggler to constant exertions, and there was by no means the same uniform vigilance on the part of Government officials which characterizes the present day. Although I am an old man, and feel a natural fondness for bygone times when I was young and vigorous. I cannot but own that the Preventive Service of Queen Victoria's reign keeps the coasts in much better order and security than was the case under those of her grandfather and her uncles. How, indeed, could it be otherwise! We were appointed by private favour, quite without respect to merit; we were scarcely looked after by our superiors, and had a hundred reasons for our remissness. Some of us were lazy, others were timid, and not a few were bribed to hear and see nothing. Then the instruments we had to work with were not of first-rate quality. Those seaports which returned members to Parliament had their own Revenue boats, manned by freemen, who drew snug salaries, and were chosen for their votes, not for their powers as oarsmen. I have known the crew of one boat quite unable to row, that of another to be found drunk and helpless at a Corporation supper when wanted for a call of duty; and yet these were the assistants on whom we were compelled to rely. Our own

men were not much more efficient; the Revenue gang, as it was called, consisted of dissolute scamps, seldom sober, and not seldom in league with the smugglers themselves. At the best they were disorderly and unprincipled to an extent hardly to be believed by those who are only accustomed to the steady, well-disciplined Coastguard of the present day.

In these circumstances it is not wonderful that so many prizes slipped through our fingers. The real wonder is that we made so many captures as we did. But we were not all drones in the hive. Some of us were as zealous as it is possible to be, and to this number in the year 1827 I belonged. I was then a young man, but I had been for some years in the Customs, and having recently been promoted to the rank of a riding officer, had attained to a sufficient salary to permit me to marry. My station was on the Kentish coast, near the town of D——, and it was one that gave me ample opportunities of showing my activity and zeal for the King's interest. In those days Kent and Sussex were the headquarters of what was called the Fair Trade, and a colossal traffic it was. Most of the sailors along the coast were concerned in the smuggling; almost all the traders of the towns had capital embarked in it; and even the farmers for miles inland had at least an annual share in some contraband venture. Many and many an old house is still in existence, under which are all manner of secret cellars and crypts, wherein the tea and brandy and other goods were stored when first landed; thence they were transferred to the barns of farmhouses a few miles from the coast, to disused kilns and quarries, to caves and woods, and other places of concealment, until they could be escorted to London.

There were great magazines of smuggled wares inland, the existence of which we vaguely knew of, but which we never even attempted to meddle with, however such a statement may provoke the incredulity of a generation accustomed to regard the law as omnipotent. But the truth is that we dared not go too far in repression of these illicit practices. If we had acted up to the full measure of our duty, we should have brought the whole hornets' nest about our ears, and that was not a risk to be made light of.

To capture a vessel and cargo did not much provoke the smugglers: their well-known calculation was that one venture successfully brought to market paid for the loss of two freights, so great were their profits in those times of a repressive tariff. But if we—the Philistines, as they called us—interfered with any of their haunts and hiding-places on shore, they regarded such an aggression as a breach of fair play and resented it accordingly.

More than once I had received well-meant warnings from reputable townsmen or farmers that I was 'too keen' in the exercise of my calling, that I should 'do myself no good' if I persisted in my active career, and that I had better take pattern by old Mr. Peabody of D——, who had for forty years looked with purblind eyes after the rights of the Crown, to the great satisfaction of the fair traders. But I was too young and hot-blooded—I hope I may add, too honest—to follow this kindly advice. To be a dumb, toothless watchdog like old Lieutenant Peabody, neither barking nor biting, but eating the King's bread on false pretences, had something in it unconquerably repulsive to me. I liked to do my duty, to receive the praise of my chiefs, the Assistant Commissioners, who had already begun to talk of my future promotion. I even took a sort of pleasure in remembering that my name was known and my vigilance feared by the hardiest desperadoes of the coast, and that my exploits had even found a niche in a corner of the county newspaper.

But I had yet another and more solid reason for trying in every way to win advancement by merit superior to that of my colleagues. I was married, as I have said, and to one born in a rank of life rather above my own—the orphan daughter of a clergyman. Cheerfully and smilingly had Lucy shared my poverty, but still I longed to be able to provide her with the comforts that had surrounded her in her youth, and it was mostly for her sake that I aspired to rise in my profession. Let no one laugh that a gauger should be ambitious. There are callings more popular and exalted, ay, and more agreeable, but no trade deserves to be utterly despised in which a man can do his work honourably and keep his hands clean from knavish practices.

The autumn of the year I have named had been a rough one, with strong, blustering weather. Such weather as that we had had is that which smugglers love. Bright nights and moonlit seas are less to their fancy than the dark and dirty weather that hides their operations from hostile eyes. In spite of the revenue officers, then, the runs had been many and profitable. The Government cutters had made few captures; the guard on shore had been baffled in almost every instance. In only one case had a large seizure been effected, and I thought myself the most fortunate of mankind in being the cause of it. Little did I dream, however, when in my lonely rides across the downs I came across that solitary hiding-place and detected its secrets, that it was my own destruction I was toiling to effect! Little did I imagine what was to follow, and what dire vengeance I was thoughtlessly provoking, when I made that ill-omened discovery. The hiding-place was in itself very curious and ingenious. Near a lone farmhouse on the high chalk downs, four miles from the sea, was a well, an old, deep well, with buckets, chain, windlass, and wooden cover, not in the least differing from a thousand other wells in the south of England. But forty feet below the surface there was a cave, or tunnelled passage, excavated in the side of this well wide enough to admit two men, and it led to a large grotto scooped out of the solid chalk, and which made a dry and roomy storehouse for the kegs and bales that filled it. Any one might have peeped down the well and suspected nothing; nor should I had I not happened to ride up just as two men, toiling at the windlass, had drawn to the light of day a bucket containing, not water, but a man in a pea-jacket and red cap, with a keg on his knee suspiciously suggestive of Hollands. This was enough for me, as I reined up my horse in the shadow of the peach-wall of the garden and peered cautiously at the scene. Quietly, as a huntsman who marks the fox steal out of covert, I made my way homewards across the springy turf, but not unseen, for when I returned with a strong force in two hours' time, the lace and silks had been removed from the well, and nothing but the bulky spirits, claret, and tea remained at the disposal of His Majesty's servants. Still, this capture made a great noise.

The Assistant Commissioner, Sir John Buckram, came to D—— on purpose to report upon it, praised me at the corporation feast, and in private promised me both reward and advancement on the very next occasion when the Minister should ask him to dinner, and thus afford him an opportunity of urging my claims.

Elated by all this, I cared little for the melancholy way in which some of those townsmen who were supposed to have the best means of knowing the opinions of the smugglers shook their heads at me when we met, and heeded even less the threatening letters which now began to arrive at my house. Ugly documents they were, these latter; misspelt and scrawled in villainous caligraphy, as if the authors wrote with a bayonet dipped in moistened gunpowder; but their contents many a time made Lucy's bright eyes grow dim and blanched her blooming cheek. I almost wish I had kept one or two that I might favour the public with a facsimile; but it can easily be imagined what sort of menaces would suggest themselves to rude, untutored beings, as wild as the waves on which they pursued their illegal and dangerous calling. I paid no heed to these threats, however, but pursued the same course as before.

One dark December afternoon—the fifth of the month it was, for I have cause to remember the date—a letter of a different stamp arrived at my dwelling. It bore the signature of the superintendent, my immediate superior, and was dated from F——, a neighbouring town, where I knew that officer resided. The letter informed me that, according to intelligence received from private sources, a great cargo was on that very night to be landed on the coast between D—— and F——. I was instructed to repair at eleven o'clock precisely to a particular part of the cliff, where I should find the superintendent and his men, who were desirous to avail themselves of my local knowledge and well-known activity in effecting this most important capture. The letter was addressed in red ink as usual, bearing the talismanic 'On His Majestys' Service,' and was sealed with the huge red seal commonly decorating such documents. One portion of the letter I have forgotten to mention. The superintendent strictly enjoined me to come alone, and on no account to speak of his communica-

tion or the rendezvous to any person at D——, whether connected with the service or not.

All that evening while I was preparing for my nocturnal expedition Lucy was sad and out of spirits, and I continually found her eyes fixed upon me with a mournful tenderness that struck a chill to my heart in spite of myself. I, on the contrary, was rather disposed to be gay and hopeful, for here was a capital opportunity of again signalizing my zeal for the King's interests and of earning the goodwill of my chiefs and perhaps that promotion which had been so lately promised me.

But Lucy was not happy; her wistful glance followed me as I moved about the little humble parlour, oiling and loading my pistols, getting ready my sword and belt, my waterproof cloak and high boots, and laying everything in the place where I could most readily snatch it up when after supper it should be time to start. Many a night had Lucy seen me busied with the self-same preparations, but never before had her heart been so heavy or her blue eyes so tearful. She was always recurring in a listless manner to the letter of the superintendent, asking to see it again and again, reading it over slowly, weighing every syllable as a scholar cons some rare manuscript in a half-forgotten language, and questioning me as to the writer's purport and meaning, in a way that would have been provoking in any one else.

'Was I *quite* sure,' she asked, 'that the letter was really in the superintendent's handwriting, and had I any of his former epistles in the house with which I could compare it?'

I laughed at her; but she persisted, and then I was obliged to own that I did not know the official's penmanship in the least. He had been newly appointed, and was personally a stranger in those parts; and though I thought I had seen documents in his writing at the Custom-house, I had never paid any attention to the caligraphy, and should not know it again.

Next, Lucy fell to examining the seal, as I have seen antiquaries poring over some half-effaced medal or coin in a museum. But this, she was forced to confess, was exactly as usual, the same lion and unicorn, the same royal

arms, and the identical motto ; even the prodigality with which the sealing-wax had been used, and the smears and blotches of it that had fallen on the envelope had an official character that defied dispute. Then Lucy must proceed to ask questions about the contents of the document, and to wonder especially why the superintendent should have desired me so peremptorily to bring no one with me from D—, and to observe strict silence as to the orders received ?

To this I could only answer, firstly, that my business was to obey my superiors, not to interrogate their motives ; and, secondly, that no doubt the superintendent was aware that some of our hired men were allies of the smugglers and in their pay, and that others were drunken rascals, who would be certain in their cups to divulge the whole affair in some water-side public-house. In fact, there were very few, in those days before the Reform Bill, on whom reliance could be placed, especially in a borough like D—, where the freemen who were in Government employ, on account of their votes, were frequently near relations of the very smugglers whom they were set to watch.

Now the superintendent, whom I had heard described as an energetic officer, had brought down with him a party of trusty subordinates, who had no local ties or likings to interfere with their utility. It was natural that he should prefer relying on his own people, and no less natural that he should desire to benefit by the minute acquaintance with the various coves and gullies of the coast for which I had acquired some credit.

My young wife listened to all this, and was silenced, but not satisfied.

Supper was a melancholy meal that night, in spite of the cheerfulness I strove to impart by dwelling on the bright prospects in store for us. I talked of the certainty of my speedy promotion to the place which it was daily expected would be resigned by the superannuated Lieutenant Peabody ; and then I made a mental leap over the next two or three years, and saw myself a superintendent and on the high-road to a still snugger berth in London itself in the head Custom-house. And I talked of a nice cottage at Islington, with garden and coach-house, and of the best of schooling for

little Alfred, who was to grow up a gentleman, and be in the Church like his grandfather, and in fact I built a score of those castles in the air which Lucy, in common with many young mothers, dearly loved. But though my wife tried to smile and prattle in her customary style, it was to no purpose; and whenever she thought I did not observe her, her eyes would fix on me in a frightened sort of way, as if she saw a peril that was invisible to others.

From one mood to another the transition is often very abrupt, and perhaps it is hardly wonderful that, having failed to cheer up Lucy, I should next have grown irritable and morose. I looked at my watch, took an extra glass of grog, and, pushing aside my plate, rose from table, and began to put on my accoutrements in silence. As I buckled the broad leathern belt around me and stuck my pistols in it, Lucy shuddered perceptibly. Often had she seen me go forth before on nights as dark and on errands as full of danger, but without any tremor, outwardly at least. I took no notice; I finished equipping myself, linking my sword close up to my left side lest it should rattle, and throwing my thick rough greggöe over all. But then Lucy came nestling to my side, and passed her soft arm round my neck, and spoke and looked so tenderly and graciously that I must have been made of crabbed stuff indeed had not my ill-temper vanished before the true eyes and the fond smile. And then nothing would serve her but she must bring baby out of his little cot to kiss papa before he went away; and the child cried, of course, at being disturbed out of his slumber, and because he did not know me in the huge cloak and oilskin hat, and Lucy hushed him in that marvellous way she had—a power of coaxing that the most stubborn urchin could never have resisted. But there was something solemn in this outburst of Lucy's tenderness; the terrors, vague and shapeless, had not quite died out of her dear blue eyes, and her voice trembled as she made baby join his little hands and murmur his little prayer for papa. I had heard her do so before, but never with such a depth of troubled expression, and I could tell that she was ill at ease. However, I pressed my lips on Lucy's soft cheek, and then on the child's little rosy face, and hurried out of the room. I had got but a short way down the cobble-stoned pavement



of the narrow street, dark and silent as the tomb, before I heard my name called.

‘Alfred! Alfred! *One* word, dearest!’

I came back, and found Lucy standing in the doorway, peering out into the night.

‘Well! What is this wonderful word?’ asked I. ‘Be quick, love, or I shall get a scolding for not being punctual.’

‘Alfred, dear!’ said my wife, hesitatingly, ‘something weighs on my mind to-night. Are you quite, *quite* sure about that letter?’

‘Sure of what?’ asked I, perhaps a little peevishly.

‘Sure that it really came from F——? that the superintendent really wrote it?’

I laughed, stopped her mouth with a kiss, telling her she was a little goose, not fit to be a sailor’s wife, and strode fast down the street again. At the corner I looked back half involuntarily, and there was the door still ajar and a streak of yellow light falling across the pavement, and Lucy on the threshold, watching my retreating steps. I waved my hand, turned the corner, and plunged into the still and sombre town.

I had a long way to walk through the roughly-paved, mean streets of the little seaport, dimly lighted as they were by the miserable oil-lamps that swung in the boisterous wind. The shutters were up everywhere, though now and then a gush of light would stream from between their chinks, and I could hear voices chatting over the cozy fires and supper-tables. The public-houses that I passed were not empty, for there was a crimson glow visible through their red curtains, and voices were heard singing or disputing in sea slang.

I got clear of the town at last, and took my lonely way up the white chalk road that led to the lofty cliffs. It was a wild night. The wind dragged and tore at my cloak, and but for the ribbon I wore I should have lost my hat before I had got twenty yards beyond the lee of the last house. Above there was a tempestuous sky, where the black clouds were rolled along in masses before the gale, and the moon peeped out very seldom—a faint new moon, like a little white crescent—while it was very dark and cheerless. In spite

of my efforts I could not keep a light heart in my breast: all nature seemed to menace and frown, and do what I would Lucy's mournful mood, the shadow of coming evil, weighed down my usually elastic spirits. Her last question, idle as I had deemed it, kept recurring to my memory: 'Was I *quite* sure that the superintendent wrote the letter?' In vain I dismissed the question; in vain I called it silly, trivial, the mere suggestion of fancy; it rang in my ears again and again as I battled my way onwards against the powerful wind.

I was off the chalk road by this time, and my feet were treading the crisp herbage of the downs. I was now obliged to advance with precaution, for the ground was irregular, and I had to climb up a steep slope of turf to reach the place of rendezvous. I came to it at last: I knew it well; a giant cliff beetling proudly above the chafing sea, and in shape resembling a monstrous wheel placed edgewise on its tyre. A well-known landmark was that cliff over many a league of sea; beacon fires had blazed on it in old times; a mighty poet had described its towering steep in words as grandly simple as itself, and throughout the length and breadth of England the precipice was known by the poet's name. For a moment I lingered on the brow of the grim sea rampart and looked out into a pall of darkness, through which the waves murmured with a mysterious sound, unseen as they were. Far away over the waters I could catch, through a break in the phalanx of clouds, the red glare of a light to warn ships from a place of peril. A moment, and the dark sky swallowed it up. No trace of man or his works was now visible. A shudder ran through me; an impulse seemed to urge me to fly, to hurry away homewards to shun—what? Pshaw! what a pitiful coward I should grow were I often thus! Was I a child to fear a dark night and a high wind! I pushed on, sneering at my own qualms. In a couple of minutes I could make out a clump of black objects specking the hillside, and standing within a few feet of the verge itself. Bushes or men? Men, for I hear the muttering of their voices. The superintendent and his party, no doubt. I hastened up to them. 'Good night, gentlemen!'

They answered never a word. In silence they opened their

ranks to receive me ; my practised eye made out, as I passed in among them, that they numbered eighteen or twenty. A whistle sharp and shrill, a roar of triumph, and I was seized and grappled with by a dozen strong hands at once. So sudden was the attack, so complete the surprise, that, although neither a feeble nor a timid man, before I could strike a blow or draw a pistol I was pinioned, disarmed, and borne down. The smugglers ! Quick as lightning itself the terrible thought flashed upon me that I had fallen into a cunningly devised snare, and was at the mercy of those lawless men who had most cause to hate me. 'A rat in a trap ! A rat in a trap !' cried several hoarse voices at once ; 'we've got the gauger at last !' And then followed a storm of abusive epithets and coarse taunts, mingled with fell curses. 'Murder the scoundrel !' 'Blow his brains out without more palaver !' 'Cut him into bait for eels !' 'Pitch the land-shark over the cliffs !' Such were a few of the savage proposals of those who crowded round me.

'Stop !' called out a voice in tones of authority ; 'drag the fellow up ; help him to his feet, some of you ; and you, Bill, flash the glim on his face to make sure he's the right devil's chicken for us.'

I was dragged to my feet ; my hands were now bound securely with a lanyard, and all resistance was impossible. Involuntarily I closed my eyes as the red bull's-eye of a dark-lantern was flashed full on my face.

'Our bird ! We've netted the villain himself !' was the unanimous acclaim. I opened my eyes, and by the partial glare of the lantern, dazzled as I was, I could see that I was in the grasp of several stoutly-made men in sailor garb, but much muffled and disguised. They were armed, for I could see the brass hilts of cutlasses, and the brass-bound stocks of pistols peep here and there from under a peacoat or an oilskin wraprascal ; but every man wore a crape mask or else had his face so besmeared with soot and gunpowder as to baffle recognition. He who seemed their chief was taller and more slender of build than the rest, though clad and armed in the same way, and he wore a loose crape before his face that fluttered with his breath. I could see only his eyes looking out from the slits in the veil ; his voice

was less gruff than the voices of his comrades; I felt assured that he, alone, was a man of education, and that on his fiat hung my doom.

'The same,' said the leader, after a pause, 'Alfred Harvey.'

There was another roar.

'Kill him!' 'Drown the gauger as you'd drown a mangy kitten!' 'Pitch him over!' 'Shoot him!' and other pleasant propositions were bellowed forth on every hand. Nor were the marks of ill-will entirely verbal. I was roughly shaken and struck by my captors, and nothing but the crowd that pressed around saved me from the more lethal strokes of clubs and cutlasses which were aimed at my defenceless head by some of the more excited of my foes.

'Who boarded the *Blue Bell*,' growled one husky voice, 'and grabbed twenty puncheons of as good Hollands as ——?'

'Who stopped the wagon by the ninth mile-stone, and seized the goods that would have given a merry Christmas to half Lingham parish?' interrupted a second fellow.

'Who made me a poor man along of tobacco?' fiercely demanded a scowling mariner, whose face I vainly scanned, so completely was it disguised by its swart colouring.

'This be he,' snarled a fourth accuser, 'that, when we'd made the D—— boat's crew as drunk as the Baltic ocean, must needs go and bring down the cursed Revenue cutter upon our craft, by token of which I had three years in a man-o'-war till I gave leg-bail; and shan't I have my revenge now?'

'Think of the Well!' bawled a fifth; and then the rage of the ruffians became overpowering. I was buffeted, overthrown, and thought I should have been trampled to death. Then I was on my feet again, bruised and dizzy, and I felt something like a cold metal ring pressing my forehead, and I knew that it was the muzzle of a pistol. I shut my eyes mechanically, breathed an inward prayer to heaven, and resigned myself to my fate.

'Fire, Jack!' exclaimed several of the gang.

'Hold!' cried the voice of the leader of this infernal crew, 'hold! would you cheat the gallows of its due? The eavesdropping rogue does not deserve to go out of the world in so gentlemanly a fashion.'

'That's true,' was the rejoinder; and then followed some fresh comments.

'Shooting's too easy a death for such as he!'

'Captain's right!'

'Hang the land-shark!'

'Over the cliff! over the cliff!'

And the pistol was withdrawn. I was almost sorry. Death had only left me for a moment to return in some more hideous shape.

'No hurry, boys,' said the superior ruffian; 'let us hear if he's anything to say in his own defence.' There was a murmur, but the man had evidently much influence, and I was accordingly drawn before him and bidden to 'Speak up.' I never shall forget that scene. The stormy night, the wild cliff, the lantern flashing upon the grim circle of blackened faces, the figure of the self-constituted judge, tall and shadowy, with only his eyes gleaming through the fluttering veil—all these were the features rather of a nightmare than of anything belonging to the real world. The whole was like some shocking dream, but it had a ghastly truth in it.

'Alfred Harvey,' said the chief, and for all his soft tones I felt more fear of him than of all the rest of the howling pack, 'Alfred Harvey, if you have anything to plead—speak.'

I spoke, but with despair at my heart. I declared that I had done nothing but my duty to the King without fear or favour; that I had borne no grudge to any man; had never been unnecessarily severe or harsh, and had merely behaved as any honest officer in my position would have done. But my plea failed of its effect. Those rugged jurors were too prejudiced to give me a hearing. They drowned my words with oaths and violent clamour.

'Silence the sea-lawyer!' was the cry; and I bitterly felt that hope was at an end.

'Alfred Harvey,' said the leader, 'listen, and you, men, hearken to the sentence. This gauger is not one of the common run of Philistines for whom some mild punishment, such as the slitting of nose and ears, or keelhauling, or even flogging and pickling, might have been enough. I declare that if it were not for that Well business I should be for

some such light infliction, but, unhappily, my duty is a sterner one. Gauger, your sentence is—death! Tie him neck and heels, and pitch him to the fishes.’

‘Tide’s out!’ remarked a fellow who held me by the shoulder.

‘Our friend will not, then, fall so soft as I thought,’ said the smuggler-captain.

A hoarse laugh hailed the brutal pleasantry. I made a violent effort to break the cord on my wrists, but though I loosened I could not snap the bonds; and though I struggled hard I was completely helpless in so many muscular hands. I pleaded no more. I scorned to ask for mercy, but, alas! my entreaties would have been idle. They led me, unresisting, to the edge of the tall cliff, beneath which boomed the sea. The moon, by this, had broken through the clouds a little, and by her wan light I could just see, at an awful depth below me, the narrow strip of beach, the narrower strip of sand beyond, spotted with chalk boulders, and the line of foamy breakers boiling on the shore.

‘Now, lads, take a good grip of the gauger,’ cried the chief. ‘One, two, three, and away!’ I was drawn back a pace or two and lifted from the ground by several strong arms.

‘I give the word,’ said the chief. ‘One!’

I was silent in my agony; I bit my lips lest a cry for mercy should escape; I grudged my tormentors that triumph.

‘Two!’ called out the leader.

There was a pause. I was swinging half off the cliff and my captors were preparing to launch me into the abyss. ‘Three!’ already trembled on the lips of the smuggler-captain.

‘Poor Lucy! God guard my wife and child!’ broke from my lips half unconsciously as I was on the point of being lurled over the precipice into the blackness of the night. There was a murmur and a movement among the men who held me. Those last words of mine, not addressed to them, had produced an effect which no oratory could have done. My entreaties they would have mocked; but after all, rugged and fierce as they were, they had wives and children

of their own that they loved, and my outspoken prayer had touched a chord in their wild hearts that made them pause.

'Three!' said the leader, but no response followed. They set me down, and stood hesitating, muttering to one another in low tones.

'I'll have no hand in it,' said one, the very fellow who had put the pistol to my brow.

'Jem says he's seen her,' grumbled another voice.

'Ay!' answered Jem, 'a pretty little blue-eyed lass she be; kind to the poor, too, my old mother said.'

'Sink me if I like it!' said another.

'Are ye chicken-hearted, you tender-conscienced, go-to-meeting dunces?' sneered the captain.

But the rough hearts of the men were touched, and they got round their leader, muttering what I could not hear. A long discussion followed. I stood meanwhile, dazed and stupefied, quivering, as it were, on the threshold betwixt life and death. The debate, of which I did not catch a word, ended with a guffaw of boisterous laughter that went roaring away on the wind. Then the captain spoke.

'Gauger,' said he, 'we are going to give you a chance. Instead of pitching you to the crabs, we mean to hang you over the edge of the cliff, like a limpet on a rock, and leave you clinging. If you hold on till morning some shepherd will save you for the gallows. If you drop—good night!' Before I could reply, I was seized again, a gag was thrust into my mouth, I was closely bindfolded, and led along the cliff to its highest point. As far as I could judge I thus traversed above a hundred yards. Then the wretches lifted me over the edge and lowered me until my chin just rested on the turf, while my hands, still tied together by the rope, were placed on the edge, so as to take a firm hold of the earth and tufted grass.

'Hold fast, gauger!' were the last words I heard, and they were almost drowned by the yells of laughter, wild, unfeeling laughter, of the ruffians who thus sported with my anguish. I could hear their retiring steps. Their voices grew feebler and more faint; they had left me to perish. 'Cruel, indeed, are the tender mercies of the wicked.' I was spared merely as a cat spares a half-dead mouse; my agonies were prolonged. But for the gag I would have

called to beg that a bullet might end my sufferings. But they were gone, and I remained; blindfolded, and suspended by my hands over the stony beach and the roaring sea. Like the fabled coffin of Mahomet, I hung between heaven and earth in mid-air. Death—a death cruel and imminent was before me. On the other hand, but a few feet of the perpendicular chalk wall divided me from life and liberty. But I was powerless to lift myself out of that nether abyss over which I swung as the strong wind rocked me sideways on my dangerous perch. For the first few minutes there was a humming in my ears like the noise of bees murmuring among the flowers in the pleasant summer time. Then this sensation, which must have been caused by a rush of blood to the head, faded away and my thoughts became endowed with almost supernatural activity. Dangling thus over my yawning grave, I seemed to take in at one eagle glance my whole past life, things long forgotten, the joys and sorrows of infancy, lessons learned at my mother's knee, childish quarrels and frowardness, and reconciliations; how I played truant at school, how I won the prize, how I was punished for some childish fault. These and many other scenes of early life passed before my blinded eyes as if painted on the slides of a magic-lantern. Then I was a man and already in my profession; my first capture, my first encounter with smugglers came before me with startling vividness, and in my fancy I felt the boat bound over the phosphorescent sea, all aglow with its blue sparkles, and as we neared the prize, and the firing and shouting began, I imagined myself once more in the old wild excitement, cheering the rowers, and with my heart bounding to every stroke of the flashing oars that carried us up to the doomed lugger. And next I was a young lover, walking at Lucy's side among the white and pink blossoms of a Devonshire orchard, and I was whispering in her ear as she blushed and faltered a rosier, fairer bloom than aught else the summer could show on the day I asked her to be mine. Then I saw little Alfred's childish face and wondering eyes, very near to mine, it seemed, and wonderfully clear and distinct, and I heard the lisping of the innocent baby's voice as he prayed for me. And then I laughed, or seemed to laugh, a wild mad laugh, that shook and tortured me, but the gag was fast between my teeth and



no sound came forth. Next I grew half delirious and my thoughts were fantastic and quaint. I was a spider swinging by a thread from a wall; I was a bat hanging by its claws from a church tower; I was a sea-mew poised on white wings over a seething sea. And then pain and cold brought back my senses. The wind was bitter, and my teeth seemed to chatter, and my feet were cold as stones and heavy as lead. Already I had hung for some time over the rock, and my hands were aching, and there were sharp cramps racking my over-strained joints, and my neck was half-dislocated. Still for dear life I clung on. My mind was active. My thoughts flew off to Lucy and her child, to her terrors and her grief, to the cold, bare poverty in store for her and hers, now the bread-winner was gone. For I deemed myself already dead. Hope was a mockery now. No mortal strength could maintain that despairing grip until the morning, and even were dawn at hand aid might not come for hours. No, for me all was over. My fancy pictured Lucy, in black, pale and poor, plying her needle in some garret, far off in some dismal quarter of a great city, where alone could scanty bread be earned for herself and her pining child. And then the clock on the belfry tower of St James' Church in D—— struck the hour, and the wind bore the sound to my ears. Twelve! every metallic chime clear and plain! Twelve! Eight more hours of darkness. No man's strength could endure a tithe of the trial. Poor Lucy! I prayed inwardly, not for life, that seemed gone, save a miracle should pluck me back from the grave, but for pardon of my sins, for mercy to those I left, that the wind might not visit too harshly those poor lone lambs. The gale slackened and a cold rain fell, lashing my face as I clung. The cramped position of my limbs gave me much pain, gradually increasing to unbearable torture. I was tempted to loosen my grasp, and to drop at once into the depths below. Still, I held on. Blindfolded as I was I vividly pictured the beach below, the yellow sand, the pebbly beach of shingle, the fragments of chalk that lay as they had fallen, the waves beating on the shore. If I fell on the beach while the tide was still out, I should be dashed to pieces, surely. Would such a death be very painful? I imagined the rush through the air, the sense of

falling through space, the breathless rapidity of the descent, the crash upon the hard beach. Should I feel it? Was it possible that I should lie for hours, like a crushed worm, with broken bones and spine, longing for death but lingering on? Better be drowned than this. Ah, if I could but hold on until the tide makes, the sea will give me a comparatively painless ending. This sad hope made me tighten my clutch: I could not live, but drowning, I had heard, was an easier death than the fall I had before me. But why die at all if I could keep my clutch till the sea washed the cliff's foot? I could swim well. I might escape. Never, never, the cruel cord that tied my galled wrists would prevent my buffeting the waves. Should I end the suspense and spring out to meet my doom halfway? No, no! I heard the waves howling nearer; I would wait, wait. Cramped, racked with pains, I could hardly hold on. But for the support my chin afforded I must have succumbed before. I had driven my stiffening fingers into the short turf, and held it in a death grip. But my powers were going fast; I was sick, dizzy, worn out. Ha! I may as well die like a man, in a struggle for life. I remembered that by a great effort I might climb to the top of the cliff and be saved. True, the exertion would be exhausting to my last remains of strength; true, there were heavy odds against it, bound as I was, but in a few moments it would be too late to try. I nerved myself for the trial, and manfully tried to lift myself, like a gymnast, by my hands, above the beetling cliff. For a moment I rose; I was poised in mid-air; I was succeeding, but the cord restrained me, my tortured arms gave way; I sank, my chin slipped off the edge of the precipice, and I now dangled, swaying at the full extent of my arms. This could not last. The pain was great; my strength was gone; in a minute I must let go and fall to die. And then a wild notion seized me that perhaps the snugglers, less utterly barbarous than I thought, were at hand, watching me, ready to save me at the last. Surely, surely, it must be so. I strove to cry to them for help, to scream that in a second it would be too late. I was gagged. No word could I utter. The bitterness of death came upon me. *I let go my hold.* But no rush, no swift dart into mid-air followed. My feet sank but a few inches, and then touched

the ground, the firm, solid ground ! It was no dream ! Was I snatched from destruction by a miracle ? I fainted, and fell to the earth. When I came to myself it was morning ; I was lying, soaked and chilled, on the wet ground ; two men, shepherds, were beside me, and one of them was trying to force gin from a pocket-flask between my teeth, while the other was loosening my cravat. The bandage had been removed from my eyes, and the cord cut that tied my wrists. I looked up, wondering whether I was in this world or the next.

‘I’m mortal glad, master, you’re come round at last,’ said one of the shepherds, ‘though how you comed here nobody could guess.’

I looked wildly about. I was not on the beach, no cliff towered overhead. I was lying in a sort of scoop or bowl in the chalk downs, not uncommon on the cliffs of the Kentish coast. And I may as well at once explain as well as I can the cruel trick of which I had been the victim. I have no doubt whatever that the smugglers, when they ensnared me by means of the forged letter, meant to have my life, which at the last moment they spared by one of those wayward impulses of generosity which sometimes sway even the most abandoned men. They had abstained from spilling my blood, not for my sake, but for the sake of my innocent wife and child, the only plea which could have moved them. But they had not been willing to let me altogether escape punishment for my over-zeal, and accordingly they had placed me in a position where I was sure to feel all the bitterness of death, save the final pang. They had left me suspended, blindfolded, over the edge of a shallow pit in the chalk, less than nine feet in depth, but with the full conviction that I was dangling over the giddy edge of the giant cliff, with a terrible death creeping upon me by slow degrees. The bottom was never above a yard from my feet, and when I fell to the full extent of my arms, being a man six feet in height, I was within six inches of the ground. But I died a thousand deaths in one during that awful hour I spent on Poet’s Cliff.

. . . . .

I resigned my situation. The illness brought on by that dreadful night aged and enfeebled me much, and I was glad to accept a clerk's place in a London institution, which my pitying friends procured me. I have thriven in another walk of life. Lucy is still by my side, my stay and comfort, and my children are all I could wish. But I have never quite recovered from the hideous anguish of that grim ordeal.

## THOMAS HARDY

1840-

### A TRADITION OF EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FOUR

THE widely discussed possibility of an invasion of England through a Channel tunnel has more than once recalled old Solomon Selby's story to my mind.

The occasion on which I numbered myself among his audience was one evening when he was sitting in the yawning chimney-corner of the inn-kitchen, with some others who had gathered there, and I entered for shelter from the rain. Withdrawing the stem of his pipe from the dental notch in which it habitually rested, he leaned back in the recess behind him and smiled into the fire. The smile was neither mirthful nor sad, not precisely humorous nor altogether thoughtful. We who knew him recognized it in a moment: it was his narrative smile. Breaking off our few desultory remarks we drew up closer, and he thus began:

'My father, as you mid know, was a shepherd all his life, and lived out by the Cove four miles yonder, where I was born and lived likewise, till I moved here shortly afore I was married. The cottage that first knew me stood on the top of the down, near the sea; there was no house within a mile and a half of it; it was built o' purpose for the farm-shepherd, and had no other use. They tell me that it is now pulled down, but that you can see where it stood by the mounds of earth and a few broken bricks that are still lying about. It was a bleak and dreary place in winter-time, but in summer it was well enough, though the garden never came

to much, because we could not get up a good shelter for the vegetables and currant bushes; and where there is much wind they don't thrive.

'Of all the years of my growing up the ones that bide clearest in my mind were eighteen hundred and three, four, and five. This was for two reasons: I had just then grown to an age when a child's eyes and ears take in and note down everything about him, and there was more at that date to bear in mind than there ever has been since with me. It was, as I need hardly tell ye, the time after the first peace, when Bonaparte was scheming his descent upon England. He had crossed the great Alp mountains, fought in Egypt, drubbed the Turks, the Austrians, and the Proosians, and now thought he'd have a slap at us. On the other side of the Channel, scarce out of sight and hail of a man standing on our English shore, the French army of a hundred and sixty thousand men and fifteen thousand horses had been brought together from all parts, and were drilling every day. Bonaparte had been three years a-making his preparations; and to ferry these soldiers and cannon and horses across he had contrived a couple of thousand flat-bottomed boats. These boats were small things, but wonderfully built. A good few of 'em were so made as to have a little stable on board each for the two horses that were to haul the cannon carried at the stern. To get in order all these, and other things required, he had assembled there five or six thousand fellows that worked at trades—carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, saddlers, and what not. O 'twas a curious time!

'Every morning Neighbour Boney would muster his multitude of soldiers on the beach, draw 'em up in line, practise 'em in the manœuvre of embarking, horses and all, till they could do it without a single hitch. My father drove a flock of ewes up into Sussex that year, and as he went along the drover's track over the high downs thereabout he could see this drilling actually going on—the accoutrements of the rank and file glittering in the sun like silver. It was thought and always said by my uncle Job, sergeant of foot (who used to know all about these matters), that Bonaparte meant to cross with oars on a calm night. The grand query with us was, Where would my gentleman land? Many of the common people thought it would be at

Dover; others, who knew how unlikely it was that any skilful general would make a business of landing just where he was expected, said he'd go either East into the River Thames, west'ard to some convenient place, most likely one of the little bays inside the Isle of Portland, between the Beal and St. Alban's Head—and for choice the three-quarter-round Cove, screened from every mortal eye, that seemed made o' purpose, out by where we lived, and which I've climmed up with two tubs of brandy across my shoulders on scores o' dark nights in my younger days. Some had heard that a part o' the French fleet would sail right round Scotland, and come up the Channel to a suitable haven. However, there was much doubt upon the matter; and no wonder, for after-years proved that Bonaparte himself could hardly make up his mind upon that great and very particular point, where to land. His uncertainty came about in this wise, that he could get no news as to where and how our troops lay in waiting, and that his knowledge of possible places where flat-bottomed boats might be quietly run ashore, and the men they brought marshalled in order, was dim to the last degree. Being flat-bottomed, they didn't require a harbour for unshipping their cargo of men, but a good shelving beach away from sight, and with a fair open road toward London. How the question posed that great Corsican tyrant (as we used to call him), what pains he took to settle it, and, above all, what a risk he ran on a particular night in trying to do so, were known only to one man here and there; and certainly to no maker of newspapers or printer of books, or my account o't would not have had so many heads shaken over it as it has by gentry who only believe what they see in printed lines.

'The flocks my father had charge of fed all about the downs near our house, overlooking the sea and shore each way for miles. In winter and early spring father was up a deal at nights, watching and tending the lambing. Often he'd go to bed early, and turn out at twelve or one; and on the other hand, he'd sometimes stay up till twelve or one, and then turn in to bed. As soon as I was old enough I used to help him, mostly in the way of keeping an eye upon the ewes while he was gone home to rest. This is what I was doing in a particular month in either the year four or five—I can't certainly fix which, but it was long

before I was took away from the sheepkeeping to be bound prentice to a trade. Every night at that time I was at the fold, about half a mile, or it may be a little more, from our cottage, and no living thing at all with me but the ewes and young lambs. Afeard? No; I was never afeard of being alone at these times; for I had been reared in such an out-step place that the lack o' human beings at night made me less fearful than the sight of 'em. Directly I saw a man's shape after dark in a lonely place I was frightened out of my senses.

'One day in that month we were surprised by a visit from my uncle Job, the sergeant in the Sixty-first foot, then in camp on the downs above King George's watering-place, several miles to the west yonder. Uncle Job dropped in about dusk, and went up with my father to the fold for an hour or two. Then he came home, had a drop to drink from the tub of sperrits that the smugglers kept us in for housing their liquor when they'd made a run, and for burning 'em off when there was danger. After that he stretched himself out on the settle to sleep. I went to bed: at one o'clock father came home, and waking me to go and take his place, according to custom, went to bed himself. On my way out the house I passed Uncle Job on the settle. He opened his eyes, and upon my telling him where I was going he said it was a shame that such a youngster as I should go up there all alone; and when he had fastened up his stock and waist-belt he set off along with me, taking a drop from the sperrit-tub in a little flat bottle that stood in the corner-cupboard.

'By and by we drew up to the fold, saw that all was right, and then, to keep ourselves warm, curled up in a heap of straw that lay inside the hatched hurdles we had set up to break the stroke of the wind when there was any. To-night, however, there was none. It was one of those very still nights when, if you stand on the high hills anywhere within two or three miles of the sea, you can hear the rise and fall of the tide along the shore, coming and going every few moments like a sort of great snore of the sleeping world. Over the lower ground there was a bit of a mist, but on the hill where we lay the air was clear, and the moon, then in her last quarter, flung a fairly good light on the grass and scattered straw.



‘While we lay there Uncle Job amused me by telling me strange stories of the wars he had served in and the wounds he had got. He had already fought the French in the Low Countries, and hoped to fight ’em again. His stories lasted so long that at last I was hardly sure that I was not a soldier myself, and had seen such service as he told of. The wonders of his tales quite bewildered my mind, till I fell asleep and dreamed of battle, smoke, and flying soldiers, all of a kind with the doings he had been bringing up to me.

‘How long my nap lasted I am not prepared to say. But some faint sounds over and above the rustle of the ewes in the straw, the bleat of the lambs, and the tinkle of the sheep-bell brought me to my waking senses. Uncle Job was still beside me; but he too had fallen asleep. I looked out from the straw, and saw what it was that had aroused me. Two men, in boat-cloaks, cocked hats, and swords, stood by the hurdles about twenty yards off.

‘I turned my ear thitherward to catch what they were saying, but though I heard every word o’t, not one did I understand. They spoke in a tongue that was not ours—in French, as I afterward found. But if I could not gain the meaning of a word, I was shrewd boy enough to find out a deal of the talkers’ business. By the light o’ the moon I could see that one of ’em carried a roll of paper in his hand, while every moment he spoke quick to his comrade, and pointed right and left with the other hand to spots along the shore. There was no doubt that he was explaining to the second gentleman the shapes and features of the coast. What happened soon after made this still clearer to me.

‘All this time I had not waked Uncle Job, but now I began to be afeared that they might light upon us, because uncle breathed so heavily through ’s nose. I put my mouth to his ear and whispered, “Uncle Job”.

“What is it, my boy?” he said, just as if he hadn’t been asleep at all.

“Hush!” says I. “Two French generals—”

“French?” says he.

“Yes,” says I. “Come to see where to land their army!”

‘I pointed ’em out; but I could say no more, for the pair

were coming at that moment much nearer to where we lay. As soon as they got as near as eight or ten yards, the officer with a roll in his hand stooped down to a slanting hurdle, unfastened his roll upon it, and spread it out. Then suddenly he sprung a dark lantern open on the paper, and showed it to be a map.

"What be they looking at?" I whispered to Uncle Job.

"A chart of the Channel", says the sergeant (knowing about such things).

The other French officer now stooped likewise, and over the map they had a long consultation, as they pointed here and there on the paper, and then hither and thither at places along the shore beneath us. I noticed that the manner of one officer was very respectful toward the other, who seemed much his superior, the second in rank calling him by a sort of title that I did not know the sense of. The head one, on the other hand, was quite familiar with his friend, and more than once clapped him on the shoulder.

Uncle Job had watched as well as I, but though the map had been in the lantern-light, their faces had always been in shade. But when they rose from stooping over the chart the light flashed upward, and fell smart upon one of 'em's features. No sooner had this happened than Uncle Job gasped, and sank down as if he'd been in a fit.

"What is it—what is it, Uncle Job?" said I.

"O good God!" says he, under the straw.

"What?" says I.

"Boney!" he groaned out.

"Who?" says I.

"Bonaparty," he said. "The Corsican ogre. O that I had got but my new-flinted firelock, that there man should die! But I haven't got my new-flinted firelock, and that there man must live. So lie low, as you value your life!"

I did lie low, as you mid suppose. But I couldn't help peeping. And then I too, lad as I was, knew that it was the face of Bonaparte. Not know Boney? I should think I did know Boney. I should have known him by half the light o' that lantern. If I had seen a picture of his features once, I had seen it a hundred times. There was his bullet head, his short neck, his round yaller cheeks and chin, his gloomy face, and his great glowing eyes. He took off his

hat to blow himself a bit, and there was the forelock in the middle of his forehead, as in all the draughts of him. In moving, his cloak fell a little open, and I could see for a moment his white-fronted jacket and one of his epaulets.

‘But none of this lasted long. In a minute he and his general had rolled up the map, shut the lantern, and turned to go down toward the shore.

‘Then Uncle Job came to himself a bit. “Slipped across in the night-time to see how to put his men ashore,” he said. “The like o’ that man’s coolness eyes will never again see! Nephew, I must act in this, and immediate, or England’s lost!”

‘When they were over the brow, we crope out, and went some little way to look after them. Half-way down they were joined by two others, and six or seven minutes brought them to the shore. Then, from behind a rock, a boat came out into the weak moonlight of the Cove, and they jumped in; it put off instantly, and vanished in a few minutes between the two rocks that stand at the mouth of the Cove as we all know. We climbed back to where we had been before, and I could see, a little way out, a larger vessel, though still not very large. The little boat drew up alongside, was made fast at the stern as I suppose, for the largest sailed away, and we saw no more.

‘My uncle Job told his officers as soon as he got back to camp; but what they thought of it I never heard—neither did he. Boney’s army never came, and a good job for me; for the Cove below my father’s house was where he meant to land, as this secret visit showed. We coast-folk should have been cut down one and all, and I should not have sat here to tell this tale.’

We who listened to old Selby that night have been familiar with his simple grave-stone for these ten years past. Thanks to the incredulity of the age his tale has been seldom repeated. But if anything short of the direct testimony of his own eyes could persuade an auditor that Bonaparte had examined these shores for himself with a view to a practicable landing-place, it would have been Solomon Selby’s manner of narrating the adventure which befell him on the down.

From *Life’s Little Ironies* (by kind permission of Mr. Thomas Hardy and Messrs. Macmillan & Co.).

# SIR ANTHONY HOPE HAWKINS

*'ANTHONY HOPE'*

1863-

## THE RIDDLE OF COUNTESS RUNA

### I

HAVING reduced the rest of his kingdom to obedience in three arduous campaigns, King Stanislas sat himself down with a great army before the strong place of Or, which was held against him by Runa, daughter of Count Theobald the Fierce. For Countess Runa said that since her father had paid neither obedience nor tribute to the King's father for fifty years, neither would she pay obedience or tribute to the King, nor would she open the city gates to him save at her own time and by her own will. So the King came and enveloped the city on all sides, so that none could pass in or out, and sent his heralds to Countess Runa demanding surrender; in default of which he would storm the ramparts, sack the city, and lay the citadel level with the earth, in such wise that men should not remember the place where it had been.

Sitting on her high chair, beneath the painted window through which the sun struck athwart her fair hair, Runa heard the message.

'Tell the King—for a king he is, though no king of mine—that we are well armed and have knights of fame with us. Tell him that we are provisioned for more months than he shall reign years, and that we will tire him sooner than he can starve us.'

She ceased speaking, and the principal herald, bowing low, asked: 'Is that all the message?'

'No, there is more. Tell him that the daughter of Count Theobald the Fierce rules in the city of Or.'

Bowing again, the principal herald asked: 'Is that all the message?'

Runa sat silent for a minute. Then she said: 'No, there is more. Tell the King that he must carry the citadel before he can pass the ramparts.'

The principal herald frowned, then smiled and said: 'But with deference, madam, how can that be? For the citadel is high on a rock, and the city lies round it below, and again round the city lie the ramparts. How, then, shall the King carry the citadel before ——?'

Runa raised her brows in weariness.

'Your speech is as long as your siege will be,' she said. 'You are a mouthpiece, Sir Herald, not an interpreter. Begone, and say to the King what I have given you to say.'

So the heralds returned to King Stanislas and gave him Runa's answer; but the King, in his wrath, listened more to the first part of it than to the last, and assaulted the ramparts fiercely for three days. But Runa's men rolled his men back with loss and in confusion, for they were in good heart because of the message Runa had sent. 'For,' they said, 'our Countess has bidden the King perform what is impossible before she will yield the city; and as we trusted Theobald the father, so we trust the daughter Runa.'

After his three assaults had failed, King Stanislas waited in quiet for a month, drawing his cordon yet more closely round the city. Then he sent again to the Countess, saying that he would spend the first half of his reign outside the walls of Or, provided he could spend the second half of it inside the same; yet if she would yield now, she should have his favour and all her wealth; but if she would not yield, she must await starvation and sack and the extremity of his anger. To which summons she answered only: 'Tell the King that he must carry the citadel before he can pass the ramparts.' And she would say no more to the heralds.

'A plague on her!' cried Stanislas. 'A plague on the woman and her insolent riddles! Of what appearance is she? I have never seen her.'

'As the sun for beauty and the moon for dignity,' said the principal herald, whose occupation naturally bred eloquence.

'Stuff!' said King Stanislas very crossly.

The herald bowed, but with an offended air.

'Does she seem sane?' asked Stanislas.

'Perfectly sane, sire,' answered the herald. 'Although, as your Majesty deigns to intimate, the purport of her message is certainly not such as might reasonably be expected from a lady presumably endowed with —'

'I am ready for the next audience,' said King Stanislas to his Chamberlain.

And after the next audience he sat down and thought. But, as often happens with meaner men, he took nothing by it, except a pain in the head and a temper much the worse. So that he ordered three more assaults on the ramparts of the City of Or, which ended as the first three had; and then sent another summons to Countess Runa, to which she returned the same answer. And for the life of him the King could see in it no meaning save that never in all his life should he pass the ramparts. 'Only an army of birds could do what she says!' he declared peevishly. Indeed he was so chagrined and shamed that he would then and there have raised the siege and returned to the capital, had it not been for the unfortunate circumstance that, on leaving it, he had publicly and solemnly vowed never to return, nor to show himself to his lieges there, unless and until he should be master of the City of Or. So there he was, unable to enter either city, and saddled with a great army to feed, winter coming on, and the entire situation, as his Chancellor observed, full of perplexity. On the top of all this, too, there were constant sounds and signs of merriment and plenty within the city, and the Countess's men, when they had eaten, took to flinging the bones of their meat to the besiegers outside—an action most insulting, however one might be pleased to interpret it.

Meanwhile Countess Runa sat among her ladies and knights, on her high chair under the emblazoned window,

with the sun striking athwart her fair hair. Often she smiled; once or twice she sighed. Perhaps she was wondering what King Stanislas would do next—and when he would understand her message.

## II

THERE was with King Stanislas' army a certain friar named Nicholas, a man who was pious, brave, and cheerful, although, in the judgement of some, more given to good-fellowship and conviviality than became his sacred profession. He was a shrewd fellow too, and had a good wit; and for all these qualities Stanislas held him in good will and allowed him some degree of familiarity. Friar Nicholas had heard the Countess Runa's message, which, indeed, had leaked through the army and been much discussed and canvassed round the camp fires. The friar had listened to all the talk, agreeing with every man in turn, nodding his head wisely, but holding his tongue closely. No man heard him utter any opinion whatsoever as to what Countess Runa meant—supposing her to mean anything save defiance pure and simple.

One night, when the King sat in his tent very moody and sore out of heart with his undertaking, the flap of the tent was lifted, and Friar Nicholas stood there.

'I did not summon you,' said the King.

'David did not summon Nathan,' said Nicholas. 'But he came to him.'

'What ewe-lamb is it that I have taken?' Stanislas asked, smiling, for he was glad to be rid of his thoughts and have company. 'Let Nathan drink with David,' he added, pushing a flagon of wine towards Nicholas, who, on this invitation, let the flap of the tent fall behind him and came in. 'Is the ewe-lamb this one city which of all the realm holds out against me? Is Or the ewe-lamb of Countess Runa?'

'The City of Or is the ewe-lamb,' said Nicholas, after he had drunk.

'But in the first place, O Prophet, I have not taken it—a curse on it! And, in the second, it is mine by right, as by right it was my father's before me. Why, then, am I to be denounced by my holy Prophet?'

'I do not come to denounce you for having taken it, but to show you how to take it,' answered Nicholas. And he stood there, in the centre of the tent, wrapping his frock close round him. 'O King,' said he, 'I will put a question to you.'

The King leant back in his chair. 'I will listen and answer,' he said.

'Where is the citadel of an army, O King?' asked Nicholas.

'An army has no citadel,' answered the King. 'A city has a citadel, a fortress of stone or of brick, set in the middle of it and on high. But an army lies in tents or on the bare ground, moving hither and thither. An army has no citadel, O Prophet! Are you answered?'

'Where is the citadel of an army, O King?' asked Nicholas again.

'An army has no citadel,' replied the King. 'A city that is made of brick and of stone has a citadel. But an army is not of brick and stone, but is made and composed only of men, of their flesh and bones, their sinews and muscles, their brains and hearts. An army has no citadel, O Prophet! Are you answered?'

'Where is the citadel of an army, O King?' asked Nicholas for the third time.

Then, seeing that he had a meaning, the King took thought; for many minutes he sat in meditation, while Nicholas stood in the centre of the tent, never moving, with his eyes set on the King's face.

At last the King answered.

'An army has a citadel,' he said. 'The citadel of an army is the stout heart of him who leads it. His heart is its citadel, O Prophet! Are you answered?'

'You have spoken it. I am answered, O King!' said Nicholas, and he turned and went out from the King's tent.

But the King sprang to his feet with an eager cry. 'It is not otherwise with a city!' he cried. 'And before I can pass the ramparts of Or, I must carry the citadel!'



## III

COUNTESS RUNA sat in her high chair under the emblazoned window of the great hall, with her ladies and knights about her, and one of her officers craved leave to bring a prisoner into her presence. Leave given, the officer presented his charge—a tall and comely young man, standing between two guards, yet bearing himself proudly and with a free man's carriage of his head. His hair was dark, his eyes blue, his shoulders broad; he was long in the leg and lean in the flank. Runa suffered her eyes to glance at him in approval.

'Where did you find him?' she asked of the officer.

'He came late last night to the southern gate,' the officer answered, 'and begged asylum from the anger of King Stanislas.'

'He's a deserter, then?' she asked, frowning a little.

'He has told us nothing. He would tell his story, he said, to your Highness only.'

'Let him speak,' she said, taking a peacock fan from one of her ladies and half hiding her face behind it.

'Speak, prisoner,' said the officer.

'If I am a prisoner, it is by my own will,' said the stranger; 'but I was in such straits that my will had no alternative save to cause me to throw myself on the mercy of your Highness. Yet I am no traitor, and wish naught but good to my lord King Stanislas.'

'Then you had best wish that he shall return to his own city and leave mine alone,' said Runa.

The knights smiled and the ladies tittered. The stranger took no heed of these things, nor, as it seemed, of her Highness's remark.

'I was high in the King's confidence,' he said. 'He deemed me a wise man, and held that I knew all that was to be known, and that by my aid alone he could discover all that was hidden, and unravel any riddle however difficult. Through three victorious campaigns I was by his side, and then he brought me to the walls of Or, not doubting that by my valour and counsel he should be enabled to make himself master of the city. I do not boast. I repeat

only what the King has many a time said of me, both publicly and when we two were alone.'

'Then one man at least has a good esteem of you,' said Runa. 'Indeed, as I think, two.'

Again the ladies tittered and the knights smiled. But the stranger was unmoved.

'Then,' he went on in a smooth equable voice whose rich tones struck pleasantly on their ears and made the ladies sorry for their mocking, 'came the day, fatal to me, when your Highness was pleased to send his Majesty a message. For when the King asked me the meaning of your riddle—asked how a man could carry the citadel before he passed the ramparts—I told him to take no heed of it, for it was an idle vaunt. And he believed me and assaulted the ramparts three times in vain. And in vain brave men died. Again came your message, and when the King asked me the meaning of it, I said it was insolent defiance. And he believed me, and assaulted the ramparts three times in vain. And in vain brave men died. Then came the message a third time, and the King demanded of me the meaning of it. But I did not know the meaning, and, lest more men should die, I confessed to him that I could not read the riddle.'

'You learnt wisdom late and at a cost,' said Runa, setting her eyes on him over the top of the peacock fan.

'When I confessed that, he called me a blockhead and, with many hard words, told me plainly that all my credit stood on my reading him that riddle, and reading it, the third time, right; and that if I could not read it, I could never see home again nor my own people, but that my life must end here outside the walls of the city, and end in disgrace and defeat. So the King said to me in his wrath, and in fear of him and of the death he threatened I stole by night from his camp and delivered myself to the officer of your Highness's watch at the southern gate of the city.'

'What do you want of me?' asked Runa.

'Either the answer to the riddle, that I may carry it back to the King forthwith and have his favour again——'

'And failing that?' said Runa, smiling.

'Leave to abide here for a while, in the hope that by my own wit I may discover the meaning.'

The knights laughed and murmured scornfully, but the ladies, on whom the stranger's appearance had made no small impression, sighed sadly, as though it were lamentable to hear a personable brave man ask such foolish things. But Runa sank her head in thought. When she raised her eyes she met those of the stranger fixed full on her. They gleamed blue and keen. A faint flush rose on Runa's cheek—or was it a red light from the painted window over her head?

'Seven days and seven nights you may abide here,' she said, 'but on condition that at the end of that time my officers deliver you to your King again. If by then you have read the riddle, it will be good for the King and for you. But if you have not read it, let it be evil for you as for him—evil unto death. How say you?'

'I accept the condition, and I will abide,' said the stranger.

Runa signed that he should be led forth. 'And leave me alone, all of you,' she said.

#### IV

SEVEN days and seven nights, then, the stranger abode in the city. Every day he held speech with Runa, both in the great hall, with the ladies and the knights, and privately. Much he told her concerning the kingdom and the King, and she showed him all the wealth and power of her city. But when she bade him speak of himself, he would answer, 'I am nothing without the King,' and would say no more of himself, so that she was full of wonder about him, and pondered more and more as to who he was and whence he came. And meanwhile the King's army lay idle in its tents and made no assault on the ramparts.

At last, on the third day, she said to him: 'Tell me why the King your master leaves all his great kingdom and makes war on my poor city?'

'The King,' he answered, 'makes war that peace may come, and union, and power. In three years he has brought

peace to all the kingdom. This city alone is left, a foe set among friends, disobedient among the obedient, a weakness amidst that which is strong. Without the kingdom the city is nothing, and without the city the kingdom is feeble.'

Runa knit her brows and heard him in silence. But after a while she said:

'Had the King sent an embassy to me with these words, it may be that I should have listened. But he sent me only a summons to surrender.'

The next day she sent for him again and said: 'If I give up my city and submit myself to the King, what am I then—I who was Runa of Or?'

'You will be high in the King's counsel and in his love,' he answered.

'I do not covet the King's love,' said Runa, knitting her brows again.

'You do not know what it is, madam,' he said softly.

On the fifth day she sent for him again, and privately, and said to him:

'If I give up my city and submit myself to the King, and there is peace in the kingdom such as there has not been since the day my father Count Theobald ruled in Or, what will the King do?'

'He will enrich the kingdom, and make it fair and secure it against all foes.'

'And what will you do?' she asked.

'I shall be by the King's side' he answered, 'if by chance I can give him good counsel.'

'And he will reward you with high honour?'

'All honour is at once mine if I read the riddle,' he replied.

'You have not read it?'

'I seek to read it in your eyes,' he answered boldly, and Runa turned her glance away from him, lest he should read the riddle there.

On the seventh day, in the evening, she sent for him again in secret, unknown to any of her knights or ladies. The great hall in which she sat alone was dimly lighted; only her face, her fair hair, and her rich robe of white gleamed from the gloom. He came and stood before her.

'To-morrow at sunrise,' she said, 'I must deliver you to

the King your master according to our agreement. What gift do you carry in your hand to turn his wrath into favour?’

‘If I do not bear in my hand the keys of the citadel, I bear nothing,’ he answered.

There fell a long silence between them, and the great hall was marvellously still. The stranger drew very near to Countess Runa and stood by the arm of her high chair.

‘Madam, farewell,’ he said.

She looked up at him and murmured softly: ‘Farewell’.

‘Yet we shall meet again.’

‘When?’ she asked, with lips just parted and eyes that strained to see his face.

‘In a day’s time, outside the ramparts.’

‘Outside the ramparts?’

‘Yes.’ He knelt before her and kissed her hand.

‘The citadel of the city is the heart of its mistress,’ he said.

She rose suddenly to her feet and would have spoken, but he raised his hand to impose silence on her. With one long look he turned away and left her alone, standing under the emblazoned window, through which one ray of moonlight caught her fair hair and illumined it.

She stood with clasped hands, her eyes still set on the door by which he had gone out.

‘My heart knows its lord,’ she whispered. ‘I have been speaking with my King.’

## V

ON the morrow, in the afternoon, King Stanislas, being returned from a journey on which affairs of State had called him, and having assumed again the command of his army, led it forth in battle array, and took up his position in the plain before the southern gate, not far from the ramparts of the city.

‘We are going to assault the ramparts again,’ said an old soldier to Friar Nicholas, who was there to see what passed and to exercise his sacred functions in case need arose.

'Nay, I think the King is going to carry the citadel,' answered the Friar, with a laugh. And all of them laughed, thinking that he jested at the King's expense.

As the clock struck four the King rode forth, magnificently appointed, and bestriding a black war-horse of great strength and spirit. When he was two hundred yards from the walls, he halted all his army and rode forward alone, save for the herald by his side. Coming close under the ramparts, which were thronged with Countess Runa's knights and men-at-arms, to say nothing of those who were ready to pour down stones and molten pitch and heavy bars of iron on the assaulters, he bade the herald cry that King Stanislas would speak with her Highness the Countess Runa.

Much stir arose on the ramparts at this message, but the King sat calm and motionless on his great black horse. So passed half-an-hour or so. Then the city gate rolled open, and Runa rode forth, in a robe of scarlet, seated on a white palfrey, and with all her knights and ladies round about her.

'This is no assault on the ramparts,' said the old soldier to Friar Nicholas, grumbling because there was danger that he should be balked of a fight.

'I think you will soon pass them, though,' said Nicholas.

When the King saw Countess Runa he touched his horse with the spur and rode up to her where she awaited his coming. When she saw him, her eyes brightened to a new brilliance. Yet she showed no wonder.

'My heart knew,' she said, when her ladies and her knights marvelled.

King Stanislas saluted her.

'Whither, my King?' she asked.

He leant down, put his arm about her waist, and lifted her from her palfrey. A great shout went up from the army in the plain and from the defenders on the walls. The King set her in front of him on his great horse.

'I carry the citadel,' he said. 'And now I will pass the ramparts;' and they two rode together into the city amidst mighty rejoicings.

## VI

To which story there are a number of morals quite out of proportion to its size.

This for Kings and Rulers: That they should state their objects openly—provided that they wish to have them known.

This for Children: That what their fathers did for fifty years, it may be wise for them to cease from doing immediately—especially if they wish to make good marriages.

This for Men: That though it be impossible that a woman should mean what she says, yet she means something by what she says—at any rate, if she says it three times.

This for Women: That though the ramparts protect the citadel, the citadel may often betray the ramparts.

And this for Everybody: That he who devotes a good intelligence to enlightening others is like unto a man who cooks his neighbour's dinner without being invited to table. For when once the citadel was carried, the ramparts passed, and the lovers happy, neither King nor Countess nor anybody else gave another thought to poor Friar Nicholas!

From *Tales of Two People* (by kind permission of the author and Messrs. Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

## SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH

1863—

### THE SINGULAR ADVENTURE OF A SMALL FREE-TRADER

[THE events which are to be narrated happened in the spring of 1808, and just before the rupture of the Peace of Amiens between our country and France; but were related to my grandfather in 1841 by one Yann, or Jean, Riel, a Breton 'merchant,' *alias* smuggler—whether or not a descendant of the famous Hervé of that name, I do not know. He chanced to fall ill while visiting some friends in the small Cornish fishing-town, of which my grandfather was the only doctor; and this is one of a number of adventures recounted by him during his convalescence. I take it from my grandfather's MSS., but am not able, at this distance of time, to learn how closely it follows the actual words of the narrator.

Smuggling in 1841 was scotched, but certainly not extinct, and the visit of M. Riel to his old customers was, as likely as not, connected with business.—Q.]

*'Item, of the Cognac 25 degrees above proof, according to sample in the little green flask, 114 ankers at 4 gallons per anker, at 5s. 6d. per gallon, the said ankers to be ready slung for horse-carriage.'*

'Now may the mischief fly away with these English!' cried my father, to whom my mother was reading the letter aloud. 'It costs a man a working day, with their gallons and sixpences, to find out of how much they mean to rob him at the end of it.'

*'Item, 2 ankers of colouring stuff at 4 gallons per anker, price as usual. The place to be as before, under Rope Haven,*



*east side of Blackhead, unless warned : and a straight run. Come close in, any wind but easterly, and can load up horses along-side. March 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> will be best, night tides suiting, and no moon. Horses will be there : two fenced lights, pilchard-store and beach, showing S.  $\frac{1}{4}$  E. to ESE. Get them in line. Same pay for freighting, and crew 17. per man, being a straight run.'*

'And little enough,' was my father's comment.

'Item, 15 little wooden dolls, jointed at the knees and elbows, the same as tante Yvonne used to sell for two sols at Saint Pol de Léon —.'

"Fifteen little wooden dolls"! "Fifteen little woo—".

My father dropped into his chair, and sat speechless, opening and shutting his mouth like a fish.

'It is here in black and white,' said my mother. I found the letter, years after, in her kist. It was written, as were all the letters we received from this Cornish venturer, in a woman's hand, small and delicate, with upstrokes like spider's thread ; written in French, too, quite easy and careless. My mother held it close to the window. "'Fifteen little wooden dolls,"' she repeated, "'jointed at the knees and elbows.'"

'Well, I've gone to sea with all sorts, from Admiral Brueys upwards ; but fifteen little wooden dolls—jointed—at—the—knees!'

'I know the sort,' I put in from the hearth, where my mother had set me to watch the *bouillon*. 'You can get as many as you like in the very next street, and at two sols apiece. I will look to that part of the cargo.'

'You, for example . . . ?'

'Yes, I ; since you promised to take me on the very next voyage after I was twelve.'

'But that's impossible. This is a straight run, as they call it, and not a mere matter of sinking the crop.'

'And next time,' I muttered bitterly, 'we shall be at war with England again, and then it will be the danger of privateers—always one excuse or another!'

My mother sighed as she looked out of the window towards the Isle de Batz. I had been coaxing her half the morning, and she had promised me to say nothing.

Well, the result was that I went. My father's lugger carried twelve hands—I counted myself, of course; and indeed my father did the same when it came to charging for the crew. Still, twelve was not an out-of-the-way number, since in these *chasse-marées* one must lower and rehoist the big sails at every fresh tack. As it happened, however, we had a fair wind right across from Roscoff, and made a good landfall of the Dodman at four in the afternoon, just twenty hours after starting. This was a trifle too early for us; so we dowsed sail, to escape notice, and waited for nightfall. As soon as it grew dark, we lowered the two tub-boats we carried—one on davits and the other inboard—and loaded them up and started to pull for shore, leaving two men behind on the lugger. My father steered the first boat, and I the other, keeping close in his wake—and a proud night that was for me! We had three good miles between us and shore; but the boats were mere shells and pulled light even with the tubs in them. So the men took it easy. I reckon that it was well past midnight before we saw the two lights which the letter had promised.

After this everything went easily. The beach at Rope Hauen is steep-to; and with the light breeze there was hardly a ripple on it. On a rising tide we ran the boats in straight upon the shingle; and in less than a minute the kegs were being hove out. By the light of the lantern on the beach I could see the shifting faces of the crowd, and the troop of horses standing behind, quite quiet, shoulder to shoulder, shaven from forelock to tail, all smooth and shining with grease. I had heard of these Cornish horses, and how closely they were clipped; but these beat all I had ever imagined. I could see no hair on them; and I saw them quite close; for in the hurry each horse, as his turn came, was run out alongside the boat; the man who led him standing knee-deep until the kegs were slung across by the single girth. As soon as this was done, a slap on the rump sent the beast shoreward, and the man scrambled out after him. There was scarcely any talk, and no noise except that caused by the wading of men and horses.

Now all this time I carried my parcel of little dolls in a satchel slung at my shoulder, and was wondering to whom I ought to deliver it. I knew a word or two of English, picked up from the smugglers that used to be common as

skate at Roscoff in those days ; so I made shift to ask one of the men alongside where the freighter might be. As well as I could make out, he said that the freighter was not on the beach ; but he pointed to a tall man standing beside the lantern and gave me to understand that this was the 'deputy'. So I slipped over the gunwale and waded ashore towards him.

As I came near, the man moved out of the light, and strolled away into the darkness to the left, I don't know upon what errand. I ran after him, as I thought, but missed him. I stood still to listen. This side of the track was quite deserted, but the noise of the runners behind me, though not loud, was enough to confuse the sound of his footsteps. After a moment, though, I heard a slight scraping of shingle, and ran forward again—plump against the warm body of some living thing.

It was a black mare, standing here close under the cliff, with the kegs ready strapped upon her. I saw the dark forms of other horses behind, and while I patted the mare's shoulder, and she turned her head to sniff and nuzzle me, another horse came up laden from the water and joined the troop behind, no man leading or following. The queer thing about my mare, though, was that her coat had no grease on it like the others, but was close and smooth as satin, and her mane as long as a colt's. She seemed so friendly that I, who had never sat astride a horse in my life, took a sudden desire to try what it felt like. So I walked round, and finding a low rock on the other side, I mounted it and laid my hands on her mane.

On this she backed a foot or two and seemed uneasy, then turned her muzzle and sniffed at my leg. 'I suppose,' thought I, 'a Cornish horse won't understand my language.' But I whispered to her to be quiet, and quiet she was at once. I found that the tubs, being slung high, made quite a little cradle between them. 'Just a moment,' I told myself, 'and then I'll slip off and run back to the boat'; and twining the fingers of my left hand in her mane, I took a spring and landed my small person prone between the two kegs, with no more damage than a barked shin-bone.

And at that very instant I heard a shrill whistle and many sudden cries of alarm ; and a noise of shouting and galloping across the beach ; and was raising my head to look when

the mare rose too, upon her hind legs, and with the fling of her neck caught me a blow on the nose that made me see stars. And then long jets of fire seemed to mingle with the stars, and I heard the *pop-pop* of pistol-shots and more shouting.

But before this we were off and away—I still flat on the mare's back, with a hand in her mane and my knees wedged against the tubs; away and galloping for the head of the beach, with the whole troop of laden horses pounding at our heels. I could see nothing but the loom of the cliff ahead and the white shingle underfoot; and I thought of nothing but to hold on—and well it was that I did, for else the horses behind had certainly trampled me flat in the darkness. But all the while I heard shouting, louder and louder, and now came more pounding of hoofs alongside, or a little ahead, and a tall man on horseback sprang out of the night, and, cannoning against the mare's shoulder, reached out a hand to catch her by rein, mane, or bridle. I should say that we raced in this way, side by side, for ten seconds or so. I could see the gilt buttons twinkling on his sleeve as he reached past my nose, and finding neither bit nor rein, laid his hand at length right on top of mine. I believe that, till then, the riding-officer—it was he, for the next time I saw a riding-officer I recognized the buttons—had no guess of anyone's being on the mare's back. But instead of the oath that I expected, he gave a shrill scream, and his arm dropped, for the mare had turned and caught it in her teeth, just above the elbow. The next moment she picked up her stride again, and forged past him. As he dropped back, a bullet or two sang over us, and one went *ping!* into the right-hand keg. But I had no time to be afraid, for the mare's neck rose again and caught me another sad knock on the nose as she heaved herself up the cliff-track, and now I had work to grip the edge of the keg, and twine my left hand tighter in her mane to prevent myself slipping back over her tail, and on to those deadly hoofs. Up we went, the loose stones flying behind us into the bushes right and left. Farther behind I heard the scrambling of many hoofs, but whether of the tub-carriers or the troopers' horses it was not for me to guess. The mare knew, however, for as the slope grew easier, she whinnied and slackened her pace to give them time to come up. This also gave me a chance

to shift my seat a bit, for the edges of the kegs were nipping my calves cruelly. The beach below us was like the wicked place in a priest's sermon—black as pitch and full of cursing—and by this time all alive with lanterns; but they showed us nothing. There was no more firing, though, and I saw no lights out at sea, so I hoped my father had managed to push off and make for the lugger.

We were now on a grassy down at the head of the cliff, and my mare, after starting again at a canter which rattled me abominably, passed into an easy gallop. I declare that except for my fears—and now, as the chill of the wind bit me, I began to be horribly afraid—it was like swinging in a hammock to the pitch of a weatherly ship. I was not in dread of falling, either; for her heels fell so lightly on the turf that they persuaded all fear of broken bones out of the thought of falling; but I *was* in desperate dread of those thundering tub-carriers just behind, who seemed to come down like a black racing wave right on top of us, and to miss us again and again by a foot or less. The *weight* of them on this wide, empty down—that was the nightmare we seemed to be running from.

We passed through an open gate, then another; then out upon hard road for half-a-mile or so (but I can tell you nothing of the actual distance or the pace), and then through a third gate. All the gates stood open; had been left so on purpose, of course; and the grey granite side-posts were my only mile-stones throughout the journey. Every mortal thing was strange as mortal thing could be. Here I was, in a foreign land I had never seen in my life, and could not see now; on horseback for the first time in my life; and going the dickens knew whither, at the dickens knew what pace; in much certain and more possible danger; alone, and without speech to explain when—as I supposed must happen sooner or later—my runaway fate should shoot me among human folk. And overhead—this seemed the oddest thing of all—shone the very same stars that were used to look in at my bedroom window over Roscoff quay. My mother had told me once that these were millions of miles away, and that people lived in them; and it came into my head as a monstrous queer thing that these people should be keeping me in view, and my own folk so far away and lost to me.

But the stars, too, began to grow faint; and little by little the fields and country took shape around us—plough, and grass, and plough again; then hard road, and a steep dip into a valley where branches met over the lane and scratched the back of my head as I ducked it; then a moorland rising straight in front, and rounded hills with the daylight on them. And as I saw this we were dashing over a granite bridge and through a whitewashed street, our hoofs drumming the villagers up from their beds. Faces looked out of windows and were gone, like scraps of a dream. But just beyond the village we passed an old labourer trudging to his work, and he jumped into the hedge and grinned as we went by.

We were climbing the moor now, at a lopping gallop that set the packet of dolls bob-bobbing on my back to a sort of tune. The horses behind were nearly spent, and the sweat had worked their soaped hides into a complete lather. But the mare generalled them all the while; and striking on a cart-track beyond the second rise of the moor, slowed down to a walk, wheeled round and scanned the troop. As they struggled up she whinnied loudly. A whistle answered her far down the lane, and at the sound of it she was off again like a bird.

The track led down into a hollow, some acres broad, like a saucer scooped between two slopes of the moor; and in the middle of it—just low enough to be hidden from the valley beneath—stood a whitewashed farmhouse, with a courtledge in front and green-painted gate; and by this gate three persons watched us as we came—a man and two women.

The man by his dress was plainly a farmer; and catching sight of me, he called out something I could not understand, and turned towards the woman beside him, whom I took to be his wife. But the other woman, who stood some paces away, was a very different person—tall and slight, like a lady; grey-haired, and yet not seeming old; with long white hands and tiny high-heeled shoes, and dressed in black silk, with a lace shawl crossed over her shoulders, and a silver whistle hanging from her neck. She came forward, holding out a handful of sugar, and spoke to the mare, if you'll believe me, in my very own Breton.

'Good Lilith!' said she, 'Ah, what a mess for me to groom! See what a coat! Good Lilith!' Then, as

Lilith munched the sugar—'Who are you, little boy? I never saw you before. Explain yourself, kindly, little boy.'

'My name is Yann,' said I; 'Yann Riel, I am from Roscoff and—O how tired, madame!'

'He is Breton! He speaks the Breton!' She clapped her hands, drew me down from my seat, and kissed me on both cheeks.

'Yann, you shall sleep now—this instant. Tell me only how you came—a word or two—that I may repeat to the farmer.'

So I did my best, and told her about the run, and the dragoons on the beach, and how I came on Lilith's back.

'Wonderful, wonderful! But how came she to allow you?'

'That I know not, madame. But when I spoke to her she was quiet at once.'

'In the Breton—you spoke in the Breton? Yes, yes, that explains—I taught her. Dear Lilith!' She patted the mare's neck, and broke off to clap her hands again and interpret the tale to the farmer and his wife; and the farmer growled a bit, and then they all began to laugh.

'He says you are a "rumgo," and you had better be put to bed. But the packet on your back—your night-shirt, I suppose? You have managed it all so complete, Yann!' And she laughed merrily.

'It holds fifteen little wooden dolls,' said I, 'jointed at the knees and elbows; and they cost two sols apiece.'

'My little dolls—you clever boy! O you clever little boy!' She kissed me twice again. 'Come, and you shall sleep, and then, when you wake, you shall see.'

She took me by the hand and hurried me into the house and upstairs to a great bedroom with a large oaken four-post bed in it, and a narrow wooden bed beside, and a fire lit, and an arm-chair by the hearth. The four-post bed had curtains of green damask, all closely pinned around it, and a green valance. But she went to the little bed, which was hung with pink dimity, and pulled the white sheets out of it and replaced them with others from a great wardrobe sunk in the wall. And while I sat in the chair by the fire, munching a crust of bread and feeling half inclined to cry and more than half inclined to sleep, she left me, and

returned with a can of hot water and a vast night-shirt of the farmer's, and bade me good-night.

'Be quick and undress, little one.' She turned at the door. 'The tubs are all in hiding by this time. Good-night, Yann.'

I believe I slept as soon as my head touched the sweet-smelling pillow; and I must have slept the round of the clock before I opened my eyes, for the room was now bright with candles, and in the arm-chair by the fire sat the Breton lady sewing as if for dear life.

But the wonder of her was that she now wore a short plain dress such as girls wear in the convent schools in Brittany, and her grey hair was tied just like a girl's. One little foot rested on the brass fender, and the firelight played on its silver shoe-buckle.

I coughed, to let her know that I was awake, and she looked across and nodded.

'Almost ten o'clock, Yann, and time for you to rise and have supper. And after supper—are you sorry?—another journey for you. At midnight you start in the gig with Farmer Ellory, who will drive you to the coast, to a town called Fowey, where some friends of his "in the trade" are starting for Roscoff. In six hours you will be aboard ship again; and in another twenty, perhaps, you will see your mother—and your father too, if he escaped clear away. In little more than a day you will be back in Brittany. But first you must lie quite still, and I will show you something.'

'To be sure I will, madame.'

'You must not call me that. I am Demoiselle Heloïse Kéranguin. You know St. Pol de Léon, Yann?'

'Almost as well as my own town, mademoiselle.'

'And the Convent of the Grey Nuns, on the road to Morlaix, a little beyond the town?'

It was on my tongue to tell her that fire and soldiery had wiped it even with the ground, during the 'Terror.' But she interrupted me. Setting down her work-basket, which was heaped high with reels and parti-coloured rags of silk, she pushed a small table over to the big bed and loaded it with candlesticks. There were three candles already alight in the room, but she lit others and set them in line—brass candlesticks, plated candlesticks, candlesticks of china-



ware—fourteen candlesticks in all, and fresh candles in each. Laying a finger on her lip, she stepped to the big bed and unfastened the corking-pins which held the green curtains together. As she pushed the curtains back I lifted myself on an elbow.

It was into a real theatre that I looked. She had transformed the whole level of the bed into a miniature stage, with buildings of cardboard, cleverly painted, and gardens cut out of silk and velvet and laid down, and rose-trees gummed on little sticks, and a fish-pond and brook of looking-glass, with embroidered flowers stuck along their edges, and along the paths (of real sand) a score of little dolls walking, all dressed in the uniform of the Grey Nuns. I declare it was so real, you could almost hear the fountain playing, with its *jet d'eau* of transparent beads strung on an invisible wire.

‘But how pretty, mademoiselle!’ I cried.

She clasped her hands nervously. ‘But is it *like*, Yann? It is so long ago that I may have forgotten. Tell me if it is like; or if there is anything wrong. I promise not to be offended.’

‘It is exactly like, mademoiselle.’

‘See, here is the Mother Superior; and this is Sœur Gabrielle. I have to make the dresses full and stiff, or they wouldn’t stand up. And that, with the blue eyes, is Sœur Hyacinthe. She walks with me—this is I—as she always did. And what do you think? With the fifteen dolls that you have brought I am going to have a real Pardon, and townspeople and fisher people to stand and worship at the altar of the Virgin, there in the corner. I made it of wax, and stamped the face with a seal that Charles gave me. He was to have been my husband when I left the school.’

‘Indeed, mademoiselle?’

‘Yes, but the soldiers burnt his house. It was but a week after I left the school, and the Château Sant-Ervoan lay but a mile from my mother’s house. He fled to us, wounded; and we carried him to the coast—there was a price on his head, and we, too, had to flee—and escaped over to England. He died on this bed, Yann. Look—’

She lifted a candle, and there on the bed’s ledge I read, in gilt lettering, some words I have never forgotten, though

it was not until years after that I got a priest to explain them to me. They were

‘C. DE. R. COMES ET ECSUL. MDCCXCIII.’

While I stared, she set the candle down again and gently drew the curtains round the bed.

‘Rise now and dress, dear child, or your supper will be cold, and the farmer impatient. You have done me good. Although I have written the farmer’s letters for him, it never seemed to me that I wrote to living people: for all I used to know in Brittany, ten years ago, are dead. For the future I shall write to you.’

She turned at the door as she said this, and that was the last I ever saw of her. For when I passed out of my room, dressed and ready for my journey, it was quite dark on the landing, where she met and kissed me. Then she slipped a little packet into my hand.

‘For the dolls,’ she said.

In the kitchen I slipped it out of my pocket and examined it under the table’s edge. It was a little silver crucifix, and I have kept it to this day.

From *Old Fires and Profitable Ghosts* (by kind permission of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and Messrs. Cassell & Co., Ltd.).

## ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

1869—

### ANCIENT LIGHTS

FROM Southwater, where he left the train, the road led due west. That he knew; for the rest he trusted to luck, being one of those born walkers who dislike asking the way. He had that instinct, and as a rule it served him well. 'A mile or so due west along the sandy road till you come to a stile on the right; then across the fields. You'll see the red house straight before you.' He glanced at the post-card's instructions once again, and once again he tried to decipher the scratched-out sentence—without success. It had been so elaborately inked over that no word was legible. Inked-out sentences in a letter were always enticing. He wondered what it was that had to be so very carefully obliterated.

The afternoon was boisterous, with a tearing, shouting wind that blew from the sea, across the Sussex weald. Massive clouds with rounded, piled-up edges, cannoned across gaping spaces of blue sky. Far away the line of Downs swept the horizon, like an arriving wave. Chanctonbury Ring rode their crest—a scudding ship, hull down before the wind. He took his hat off and walked rapidly, breathing great draughts of air with delight and exhilaration. The road was deserted; no horsemen, bicycles, or motors; not even a tradesman's cart; no single walker. But anyhow he would never have asked the way. Keeping a sharp eye for the stile, he pounded along, while the wind tossed the cloak against his face, and made waves across the blue puddles in the yellow road. The trees showed their under leaves of white. The bracken and the high new grass bent all one way. Great life was in the day, high spirits and

dancing everywhere. And for a Croydon surveyor's clerk just out of an office this was like a holiday at the sea.

It was a day for high adventure, and his heart rose up to meet the mood of Nature. His umbrella with the silver ring ought to have been a sword, and his brown shoes should have been top-boots with spurs upon the heels. Where hid the Enchanted Castle and the princess with the hair of sunny gold? His horse . . .

The stile came suddenly into view and nipped adventure in the bud. Everyday clothes took him prisoner again. He was a surveyor's clerk, middle-aged, earning three pounds a week, coming from Croydon to see about a client's proposed alterations in a wood—something to ensure a better view from the dining-room window. Across the fields, perhaps a mile away, he saw the red house gleaming in the sunshine; and resting on the stile a moment to get his breath he noticed a copse of oak and hornbeam on the right. 'Aha,' he told himself, 'so that must be the wood he wants to cut down to improve the view? I'll 'ave a look at it.' There were boards up, of course, but there was an inviting little path as well. 'I'm not a trespasser,' he said; 'it's part of my business, this is.' He scrambled awkwardly over the gate and entered the copse. A little round would bring him to the field again.

But the moment he passed among the trees the wind ceased shouting and a stillness dropped upon the world. So dense was the growth that the sunshine only came through in isolated patches. The air was close. He mopped his forehead and put his green felt hat on, but a low branch knocked it off again at once, and as he stooped an elastic twig swung back and stung his face. There were flowers along both edges of the little path; glades opened on either side; ferns curved about in damper corners, and the smell of earth and foliage was rich and sweet. It was cooler here. What an enchanting little wood, he thought, turning down a small green glade where the sunshine flickered like silver wings. How it danced and fluttered and moved about! He put a dark blue flower in his button-hole. Again his hat, caught by an oak branch as he rose, was knocked from his head, falling across his eyes. And this time he did not put it on again. Swinging his umbrella, he walked on with uncovered head, whistling

rather loudly as he went. But the thickness of the trees hardly encouraged whistling, and something of his gaiety and high spirits seemed to leave him. He suddenly found himself treading circumspectly and with caution. The stillness in the wood was so peculiar.

There was a rustle among the ferns and leaves and something shot across the path ten yards ahead, stopped abruptly an instant with head cocked sideways to stare, then dived again beneath the underbrush with the speed of a shadow. He started like a frightened child, laughing the next second that a mere pheasant could have made him jump. In the distance he heard wheels upon the road, and wondered why the sound was pleasant. 'Good old butcher's cart,' he said to himself—then realized that he was going in the wrong direction and had somehow got turned round. For the road should be behind him, not in front.

And he hurriedly took another narrow glade that lost itself in greenness to the right. 'That's my direction, of course,' he said; 'the trees have mixed me up a bit, it seems'—then found himself abruptly by the gate he had first climbed over. He had merely made a circle. Surprise became almost discomfiture then. And a man, dressed like a gamekeeper in brown green, leaned against the gate, hitting his legs with a switch. 'I'm making for Mr. Lumley's farm,' explained the walker; 'this is his wood, I believe—' then stopped dead, because it was no man at all, but merely an effect of light and shade and foliage. He stepped back to reconstruct the singular illusion, but the wind shook the branches roughly here on the edge of the wood and the foliage refused to reconstruct the figure. The leaves all rustled strangely. And just then the sun went behind a cloud, making the whole wood look otherwise. Yet how the mind could be thus doubly deceived was indeed remarkable, for it almost seemed to him the man had answered, spoken—or was this the shuffling noise the branches made?—and had pointed with his switch to the notice-board upon the nearest tree. The words rang on in his head, but of course he had imagined them: 'No, it's not his wood. It's ours.' And some village wit, moreover, had changed the lettering on the weather-beaten board, for it read quite plainly, 'Trespassers will be persecuted'.

And while the astonished clerk read the words and

chuckled, he said to himself, thinking what a tale he'd have to tell his wife and children later—'The blooming wood has tried to chuck me out. But I'll go in again. Why, it's only a matter of a square acre at most. I'm bound to reach the fields on the other side if I keep straight on.' He remembered his position in the office. He had a certain dignity to maintain.

The cloud passed from below the sun, and light splashed suddenly in all manner of unlikely places. The man went straight on. He felt a touch of puzzling confusion somewhere; this way the copse had of shifting from sunshine into shadow doubtless troubled sight a little. To his relief, at last, a new glade opened through the trees and disclosed the fields with a glimpse of the red house in the distance at the far end. But a little wicket gate that stood across the path had first to be climbed, and as he scrambled heavily over—for it would not open—he got the astonishing feeling that it slid off side-ways beneath his weight, and towards the wood. Like the moving staircases at Harrod's and Earl's Court, it began to glide off with him. It was quite horrible. He made a violent effort to get down before it carried him into the trees, but his feet became entangled with the bars and umbrella, so that he fell heavily upon the farther side, arms spread across the grass and nettles, boots clutched between the first and second bars. He lay there a moment like a man crucified upside down, and while he struggled to get disentangled—feet, bars, and umbrella formed a regular net—he saw the little man in brownny green go past him with extreme rapidity through the wood. The man was laughing. He passed across the glade some fifty yards away, and he was not alone this time. A companion like himself went with him. The clerk, now upon his feet again, watched them disappear into the gloom of green beyond. 'They're tramps, not gamekeepers,' he said to himself, half mortified, half angry. But his heart was thumping dreadfully, and he dared not utter all his thought.

He examined the wicket gate, convinced it was a trick gate somehow—then went hurriedly on again, disturbed beyond belief to see that the glade no longer opened into fields, but curved away to the right. What in the world had happened to him? His sight was so utterly at fault.

Again the sun flamed out abruptly, and lit the floor of the wood with pools of silver, and at the same moment a violent gust of wind passed shouting overhead. Drops fell clattering everywhere upon the leaves, making a sharp pattering as of many footsteps. The whole copse shuddered and went moving.

'Rain, by George,' thought the clerk, and feeling for his umbrella, discovered he had lost it. He turned back to the gate and found it lying on the farther side. To his amazement he saw the fields at the far end of the glade, the red house, too, ashine in the sunset. He laughed then, for, of course, in his struggle with the gate, he had somehow got turned round—had fallen back instead of forwards. Climbing over, this time quite easily, he retraced his steps. The silver band, he saw, had been torn from the umbrella. No doubt his foot, a nail, or something had caught in it and ripped it off. The clerk began to run; he felt extraordinarily dismayed.

But, while he ran, the entire wood ran with him, round him, to and fro, trees shifting like living things, leaves folding and unfolding, trunks darting backwards and forwards, and branches disclosing enormous empty spaces, then closing up again before he could look into them. There were footsteps everywhere, and laughing, crying voices, and crowds of figures gathering just behind his back till the glade, he knew, was thick with moving life. The wind in his ears, of course, produced the voices and the laughter, while sun and clouds, plunging the copse alternately in shadow and bright dazzling light, created the figures. But he did not like it, and he went as fast as ever his sturdy legs could take him. He was frightened now. This was no story for his wife and children. He ran like the wind. But his feet made no sound upon the soft mossy turf.

Then, to his horror, he saw that the glade grew narrow, nettles and weeds stood thick across it, it dwindled down into a tiny path, and twenty yards ahead it stopped finally and melted off among the trees. What the trick gate had failed to achieve, this twisting glade accomplished easily—carried him in bodily among the dense and crowding trees.

There was only one thing to do,—turn sharply and dash back again, run headlong into the life that followed at his back, followed so closely too that now it almost touched him,

pushing him in. And with reckless courage this was what he did. It seemed a fearful thing to do. He turned with a sort of violent spring, head down and shoulders forward, hands stretched before his face. He made the plunge; like a hunted creature he charged full tilt the other way, meeting the wind now in his face.

Good Lord! The glade behind him had closed up as well; there was no longer any path at all. Turning round and round, like an animal at bay, he searched for an opening, a way of escape, searched frantically, breathlessly, terrified now in his bones. But foliage surrounded him, branches blocked the way; the trees stood close and still, unshaken by a breath of wind; and the sun dipped that moment behind a great black cloud. The entire wood turned dark and silent. It watched him.

Perhaps it was this final touch of sudden blackness that made him act so foolishly, as though he had really lost his head. At any rate, without pausing to think, he dashed headlong in among the trees again. There was a sensation of being stiflingly surrounded and entangled, and that he *must* break out at all costs—out and away into the open of the blessed fields and air. He did this ill-considered thing, and apparently charged straight into an oak that deliberately moved into his path to stop him. He saw it shift across a good full yard, and being a measuring man, accustomed to theodolite and chain, he ought to know. He fell, saw stars, and felt a thousand tiny fingers tugging and pulling at his hands and neck and ankles. The stinging nettles, no doubt, were responsible for this. He thought of it later. At the moment it felt diabolically calculated.

But another remarkable illusion was not so easily explained. For all in a moment, it seemed, the entire wood went sliding past him with a thick deep rustling of leaves and laughter, myriad footsteps, and tiny little active, energetic shapes; two men in brownny green gave him a mighty hoist—and he opened his eyes to find himself lying in the meadow beside the stile where first his incredible adventure had begun. The wood stood in its usual place and stared down upon him in the sunlight. There was the red house in the distance as before. Above him grinned the weather-beaten notice-board: 'Trespassers will be prosecuted.'

Dishevelled in mind and body, and a good deal shaken in





his official soul, the clerk walked slowly across the fields. But on the way he glanced once more at the post-card of instructions, and saw with dull amazement that the inked-out sentence was quite legible after all beneath the scratches made across it: 'There is a short cut through the wood—the wood I want cut down—if you care to take it.' Only 'care' was so badly written, it looked more like another word; the 'c' was uncommonly like 'd'.

'That's the copse that spoils my view of the Downs, you see,' his client explained to him later, pointing across the fields, and referring to the ordnance map beside him. 'I want it cut down and a path made so and so.' His finger indicated direction on the map. 'The Fairy Wood—it's still called, and it's far older than this house. Come now, if you're ready, Mr. Thomas, we might go out and have a look at it. . .'

From *Ten Minute Stories* (by kind permission of Mr. Algernon Blackwood and Mr. John Murray).